



# ESCAPE FROM MOSCOW

*The Diary of a Russian Student*

by  
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(With ILYON POMAROV)

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## PREFACE

THE reading public must be surfeited with books praising Soviet Russia, attacking Soviet Russia, or trying to explain to the Western reader a political mode of thought almost inexplicable to the Western mind. Books by exiles and refugees abound—mostly sympathetic, criticizing the Soviet Union with unmeasured bitterness and throwing the West of clouds of doom in the Eastern sky. Others, pathetically nostalgic, long for bygone days, and hope, in gentle futility, for a miraculous disintegration of the New Empire and a restoration of that of the Czar. But the emigré and the refugee are usually, by their very nature, unable to understand the Soviet system as it has been developed by the new generation that has grown up since the Revolution. From this they are precluded by age or by hate. Their books may expound Soviet policy or theory. They can seldom picture the Soviet mind.

This book is an exception. For it is by a young Russian whose outlook has been formed by Marxism, who has longings for the old régime, and who, though a voluntary exile from Russia, still accepts and admires much in the Soviet system, and whose mental outlook is as much impregnated by Marxism as that of the educated young European is by the Graeco-Roman tradition. In the liberal atmosphere of Paris, enjoying its freedom and appreciating its culture, the young man who writes under the pseudonym of Stephan Strogov still remains indelibly marked by the stigmata of the Marxist Revelation.

It would be foolish to look to this book for any encouragement for the wishful thinking that leads some Westerners to believe that an upsurge of critical thinking in Russia may lead to a speedy and bloodless dissolution of the Marxist



State: Though he has broken his country's laws and abandoned her soil, though he is sufficiently free in his mind to criticize her institutions and her customs, the author still loves his country. So do most anti-Soviet Russians. But, unlike them, the writer of this book, on balancing the civilization of the West against that of Russia, often inclines to that of Russia . . . "the most advanced country in the world, the one with the fairest social system. . . . At school it has been explained to me at length and proved by facts and figures. I believed it, and I still believe it."

"I still believe it." These words are significant. They are those of the new generation of Marxists who, even if they criticize aspects of the Marxist society, are as much instinctively influenced by its ideology as the sceptical or agnostic student of the Boulevard Saint-Michel, or Bloomsbury is influenced by the inheritance transmitted to him by the classical world. In the naïve reflections of this young Russian the world debate of our century appears in a perhaps more menacing, because more fundamental, aspect than in the alignment of hostile alliances or the thunder of armament factories.

A dead and much underestimated English poet once imagined a message given to an English king when he was a fugitive before victorious and seemingly irresistible foes. To Alfred, guarding in Athelney the last flicker of Roman civilization, was said:

"I tell you naught for your comfort,  
Yea, naught for your desire,  
Save that the sky grows darker yet  
And the sea rises higher."<sup>1</sup>

No more comfort will be given to the reader who hopes to find in this book signs of any immediate weakening of

<sup>1</sup> The quotation is from "The Ballad of the White Horse," by G. K. Chesterton.

the Marxist attack on the foundations of Christendom. In his self-imposed exile, and as the writer of a book which will be hailed by many as an anti-Soviet work, Stephan Strogov is an exponent of the success of Marxist ideology among the young. For a political or social system is formidable when its young people criticize it while not withholding their admiration and affection.

But, in a longer view, there may be ground for hope in this book. For what is really important is that Stephen was fired by Andreivitch Saltykov with a desire to travel, that he *did* decide to take his destiny in his own hands, that he *did* leave Russia, even that he did such human things as to have too good a dinner in Bucharest and to make love in Venice.

In all this he showed the normal human reactions of a young man - the reactions which, through the centuries, have saved men from wrong—as when Odysseus cleared his house of wastrels or David Copperfield dealt with his master. And the significant thing is that all this was done by a young man brought up in a Marxist society, mentally conditioned by Marxism, and still professing his respect for a way of thought which should logically fill him with shame for the things he did. He is shockingly illogical. But such lack of logic is quite literally on the side of the angels.

According to the Marxist belief, Man is infinitely malleable, and the perfectionist community can be created by human conditioning. The Christian replies that this is fundamentally untrue, for every soul is new and is inspired by the breath of God. The individual may be crushed or distorted by false teaching, but the unchanging Spirit of God will still be latent in every new individual when he is born. The State may—generation after generation—twist and warp its subjects. But every State, every human system, dies some day, whereas human nature, which does not die or change, always reasserts itself. The individual is greater and more lasting than the State.

"What is a soul?" asked the author of this book, of the Jesuit priest in Rumania, ~~without~~ reflecting that he had perhaps answered the question when he asserted his right to act as a free man, in despite of a State which he respected and an ideology which he accepted. "To-day," he writes, "it occurs to me that a dying and a new-born world faced each other that morning in that sequestered spot in the Galician forest." Yes, indeed, but perhaps not in the sense that he understood. For in the soul of the young Communist were confronted that political Leviathan which must, by its nature, by a dying thing, and the unchanging principles of human nature, which are new-born in every man, and which are the foundations without which no State or social system can long abide.

HUGH SELLON

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**PART I**

**A RUSSIAN CHILDHOOD**



## V.E. DAY IN MOSCOW

EARLY on May 8, 1945, the loudspeakers relaying Radio Moscow, that are to be found in the flats of most of the well-to-do citizens of the capital, informed us of the wonderful news. The armistice was signed and the dreadful nightmare which had gone on for four years was over.

In front of the University little groups of students were discussing the news. Its doors remained closed as the day had been proclaimed a holiday. Basil Morosov, Andrew Gurevitch and I went off to play volley-ball in the Central Park. I then returned home to dinner, having arranged to meet Basil that evening in Red Square.

By the end of the afternoon the streets were teeming with people. Whenever a victory was announced firework displays took place from the great buildings in Red Square and it was generally expected that the display that night would be particularly brilliant.

And so it turned out. From eight onwards rockets and flares were going off all the time. The whole sky was alight and covered with brilliantly illuminated portraits of Stalin. I never fathomed how they were made to float up there. It was like fairyland. For once the manifestations of joy on the part of the populace were wholly spontaneous and not just to order as they were for the parades and processions on May 1, or the anniversary of the Revolution. In the squares stands were set up and orchestras were pouring out music—popular tunes or even “western” music, as modern dance tunes are called in Russia. I could scarcely make my way through the crowd to meet Basil near the Tretyakov gallery as arranged.

Basil was one of my best friends. We shared a tent in many a Pioneer camp, we worked together for our



university entrance examination. Yet I had never disclosed to him the secret thought that obsessed me. In the atmosphere of rejoicing prevailing that evening it was he who gave me an opening.

"Vassia!" I exclaimed. "Look at the French airmen!" (We had frequently an opportunity of admiring the airmen of the Normandie-Niemen squadron—passers-by would crowd round them at the entrance to the Hotel Metropol where they were quartered.)

"Eucky devils," replied Vassia, "they've seen a country or two!"

"And now perhaps we too will be able to travel. There are sure to be great changes. We might even be able to go to America, get a visa for the U.S.A. and see the skyscrapers in New York."

The words were hardly out of my mouth than almost instinctively my heart sank. Had I said too much?

The night was beautiful and the joy of victory intoxicating—the future seemed infinitely promising. But there are certain rules that a young Soviet citizen, especially if he is a student and intended for a teaching career in a university, must be careful not to break. It is a matter of prudence and it is also—how shall I put it?—a matter of self-respect. Since the laws of our beloved country forbid citizens to visit capitalist countries, what good purpose can be served by mentioning, in the presence of another, even of a trusted friend, one's inmost thoughts when implying criticism of the régime.

And yet . . .

## BIRTH OF A DREAM

I LET my thoughts run on. Of course, I knew that I had the happiness of living in the land of socialism, in the most advanced country of the world, and the one with the fairest

social system. I had known it for a long time. At school it had been explained to me at length and proved by facts and figures. I believed it (and I still believe it). But it was at school also that was born the cherished dream of my youth. .

Our geography master, Andrevitch Saltykov, was a wizened old man with a little white beard who could fire the enthusiasm of his class. He had travelled extensively—before the Revolution, of course—and when he talked to us of the ruins of the Parthenon, of Rome and the Forum, of Paris and Notre-Dame, we listened to him with open mouths; you could have heard a pin drop in the classroom. Looking back now, it seems to me that he must have been a counter-revolutionary. But nothing ever happened to him because he avoided politics and confined himself to conjuring up before our childish minds the marvellous scenery and wonderful monuments of ancient Europe.

We were already well aware that for Soviet citizens these things were forbidden fruit, but that only fired our imaginations the more. Should I never be able to see all these wonders with my own eyes, I asked myself at every lesson. It was only a childish dream, but it was a dream that never ceased to haunt me.

Later on, during the war, the labels on the tins of American corned beef which, in 1943, formed the staple food of quite half the population of Moscow, the words *Made in U.S.A.* appearing on the lorries and goods trucks, seemed to me like so many messages from the forbidden world outside. Weren't the British, the Americans and the French our allies? Was it, then, a crime to desire to know the country of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, of whom our newspapers spoke with such enthusiasm?

It was nothing but a dream, a hopeless dream, but that glorious night of May 8, 1945, impelled me to put it into words and directly I had done so action followed hard on

speech, action that has enabled me to reach French and English readers. But before I relate my great adventure it will be as well perhaps to give some account of my childhood and youth.

## EARLIEST MEMORIES

My early childhood was, I suppose, just like that of anyone else. As in a dream I can see myself astride my mother's back as she carried me to my little white bed after my bath. Sometimes I dropped to sleep in my bath and I was very surprised to find myself in bed. I can also remember a fearful fit of crying because I thought that a bar of chocolate that my father had brought home with him had been unfairly divided up—my brother's and sister's share seemed larger than my own. My fury was the greater because chocolate was an exceedingly rare commodity at that time. Though I had no great experience of hunger: my father was a "scientific worker" and for that reason was entitled to draw for himself and his family the rations of a "heavy worker" during the famine of 1932 when ration cards were introduced.

Nevertheless I have clear memories of the great famine. I recall a journey to the Ukraine, where I spent three months with my grandparents. At Kharkov I remember seeing peasants lying strangely motionless on the ground in Lenin Square.

"What are those men doing on the ground?" I asked my mother.

I imagine that she gave me an evasive answer. I know now that they were the victims of the great Collectivization famine, known as Kulaks, who had come to the great city in hope of picking up something to eat. At the time I knew nothing of all this; my relations were careful and I learned

no more while I was with my grandparents. My grandfather, a retired schoolmaster, was a well-known apiculturist, the author of several learned communications to the Academy of Science, and on this account he had been allowed to keep his fine house and large orchard. But on a walk I noticed other orchards surrounding other houses; the latter were empty and silent and no one, it seemed, bothered to gather the apples, pears or plums which were lying heaped up on the ground. The "Party line" at that time ordained that property owners should go and cut down trees in the Arctic, starving while their fruit lay rotting on the ground. But I repeat that then I knew nothing of all this and politics came into my life from an entirely different direction.

## SCHOOL

At school, where I first went in 1932, the two subjects which interested me especially were geography, which I have already mentioned, and history of the Revolution. The latter was very important and three hours a week were devoted to it. Just as old Saltykov managed to arouse my enthusiasm for strange countries Ivan Popov, still a young man but wearing a thick black beard, a former student and volunteer of 1918, managed to excite my imagination with the exploits of the revolutionaries. Lenin, Stalin, Voroshilov, Bukharin and Chapaiev were my heroes at this time. How I wished that I was old enough to have fought by their side. My dearest wish was to show myself worthy of them when the time came to fight as they had done, so that the Revolution should triumph in Germany, France and throughout the world. To fight on behalf of this cause appeared to us as right and necessary as it does to a French or English schoolboy to defend his own country, save that for us,

budding revolutionaries, our country was the whole world. And we dreamt of a world socialist republic with Moscow as its capital.

Besides these two subjects we were taught, as in all schools the world over, grammar, arithmetic and natural science. Like all Russian schools at this period ours was a mixed school; boys and girls behaved well together and I think that no disturbing element ever came to upset our good relations. And when, quite early on, the science master explained to us at the blackboard, chalk in hand, the mystery of procreation, relations between boys and girls were none the worse for it. On the contrary. All the same, it was following this lesson, I think, that all the boys in our class made up their minds as one man that they were in love with Lydia Stepanova, the Russian mistress, a beautiful young woman with fair hair piled in coils on her head, and conceived a dislike for Beridze, the drawing master, to whom she was engaged.

The social life of our class was particularly intense. Children as we were, we had to discuss in committee many important questions. There was the school magazine committee: each class elected two delegates, one for the general editorial committee and the other to record the activities of our class. Then there was the economic committee. Times were hard and exercise books, pencils and rubbers were very scarce and never to be found in the shops; the meagre stock of these commodities provided for us by the school was in our charge. In the presence of Ivan Popov, an interested but generally silent spectator, the three members of the economic committee, elected by universal suffrage of the pupils, solemnly discussed if an exercise book could be allowed to Nadia Chubar, who, for the third time, asserted that she had lost her own. Had she not perhaps exchanged it for a bag of sweets? And if she had done so what was the proper punishment for such a crime?

Lastly, there was the Pioneers' committee. We were all Pioneers. It was not compulsory, but it was unthinkable not to join this movement which, outside the school walls, perpetuated the closely knit community that we already formed:

Pioneers! The word conjures up the long Sunday walks in the Moscow neighbourhood, and holidays in the Crimea, under canvas by the seaside . . . the camp-fire, our games and the tests we had to pass, and also the political lectures about the Chinese revolution and capitalist exploitation, and our route marches as we swung along singing:

Down with rabbis  
Monks and priests.

In fact, out of three lectures that we had every Thursday at Pioneer headquarters one at least was sure to be devoted to anti-religious propaganda. I remember a series of lectures given by a skilled conjuror, who contrived to reproduce one by one the miracles of the Bible—Moses' rod, the water changed into wine, the miracle of the loaves, and so on. When he had manipulated his flasks and test tubes he explained his methods at length. "The prophets were tricksters, but they knew their trade," he told us with a certain satisfaction.

So passed our pleasures and our days. We were poorly dressed and often under-nourished, but we were well with ourselves and I think that we were happy.

## FIRST DOUBTS

HISTORY tells us that in 1936 and 1937 there occurred a certain number of prosecutions during which it appeared that the Bolshevik Old Guard, having gone over almost entirely to the service of the capitalist countries, entertained

no other plan than the stamping out of the Revolution and the overthrow of the Soviet régime.

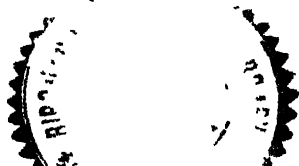
That emerged clearly from the confessions of the accused themselves, since from Kamenev to Radck and from Zinoviev to Bukharin they were all unanimous in confessing their crimes. This is all now part of history, but for me it forms part of my childhood memories which still remain vividly in my mind. I no longer remember whether it was in 1936 or 1937, but I can recall the profound confusion that it provoked in my mind.

So these men who had been my idols were spies and murderers. These heroes of 1918, men of iron as I had thought them, far from following Danton's and Dimitrov's example (children of the U.S.S.R. knew their classics) were humbly confessing their crime. But then, I asked myself, how was the Revolution the work of wretches and traitors?

There was something incredible about the whole thing. Yet the idea never crossed my mind that the accusation was a complete fabrication. For the first time my childish faith was seriously troubled. I felt that there was something wrong somewhere.

• Did I talk about it with my schoolfellows? I no longer remember. But my revolutionary ardour was somewhat damped as a consequence. That does not mean that I did not continue to take part with a certain enthusiasm in the great celebrations on May 1 or October 25 when, with red banners going before, all the school children of Moscow followed by the workers at the important factories marched through the streets. These great parades exerted an irresistible attraction on youth. But I no longer dreamt of the Soviet Socialist Republic of the World with Moscow as its capital.

Compared with this shock, my other memories of this period, to which a Western mind would have been tempted to attribute far greater importance, do not stand out very clearly. There was, of course, a time when certain of our



masters disappeared as if by magic. I know now that it was during the great Purge; their place was taken by others and that seemed almost normal to us, though I was sorry that Ivan Popov had gone, for he had conjured up for us the heroic years. My family was untouched by those terrible years, as they are known; no one among my close relations was sufficiently important nor politically active to be troubled. But possibly it was a further consequence of those events which turned me into an eager reader of the newspapers, and one who approached them thereafter in some sort of critical spirit. If a British dock strike made the headlines in *Pravda*, I was pleased to know that their legitimate claims had been met; but it occurred to me also that they enjoyed the possibility of going on strike without being put in prison for it or shot. And thus my interest in foreign, the so-called capitalist, countries was revived.

There was a new boy at school, the son of a Foreign Office official, who had just spent a year with his parents in Stockholm. Michael Zvorykin surprised us in the first place by his suits—he possessed two—which were of an unusual cut and made of a thick blue and thick grey cloth. Few of us possessed a woollen suit at all and our usual dress consisted of shorts and jersey.

I can never emphasize sufficiently the passionate curiosity of young Russians about everything which comes from abroad, from *zagranitza* (over the frontier). Eagerly we plied Zvorykin with questions: "I say, Michael, do they have Pioneer camps in Sweden? Is it true that only the children of the rich go to school? Is there an underground railway in Stockholm?"

He was able to reassure us about the Underground; there was none in Stockholm and we concluded, somewhat hastily, that none existed anywhere abroad; in addition he confirmed that education was a privilege of the rich since in Swedish schools all the boys were dressed as he was and

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almost all possessed a bicycle. This information, in entire agreement with what our schoolbooks and newspapers told us, conflicted nevertheless with other details that he gave us concerning the number of shops and the large display of goods in them, and the great density of traffic requiring traffic lights at the cross-roads. Foreign countries were very odd, we said to ourselves, and I believe that it was from hearing accounts like this, so many little glimpses into the capitalist world, that finally gave birth in our minds to those sentiments of doubt and that particular feeling of inferiority that most Russians of my generation experience with regard to foreign countries. No doubt it is that which nowadays in U.S.S.R. is dubbed "cosmopolitan tendencies." For my part my own cosmopolitanism at that period was expressed in the absolute mania I had for collecting coins and notes. Among my treasures were a few silver kopeks and even a gold ruble of Czarist times, *kerenkis* of 1917 and a note issued by Denikin's army. But of them all I valued most a fifty-piastre piece bearing the head of King Fuad and struck by the Royal Bank of Egypt.

The reader should not think, however, that, politically minded as young Russians were, they had anything else in mind than the comparative merits of the different forms of government and an ardent desire to know the truth about other countries. They, too, experienced the joys and sorrows of all other children in the world, and for my own part my holidays in the Caucasus in 1936 or 1937 (I no longer remember which), when I spent whole days reading Pushkin and Serfontov and dreaming of love, remain the most marvellous memory of my life. It was at this time that I began to write poetry. Spain on fire was one of the chief subjects which inspired me, and I was sorry that I was too young and unable to take part in the struggle which, from a distance, seemed to me, the adolescent that I then was, romantic to a degree.

## FURTHER DISAPPOINTMENTS

I RETURNED to Moscow my head stuffed with romantic ideas. In my own mind I had fully determined to fall in love and, when school began again, my choice fell on my classmate Nina Tarakanova. In this I was not alone, however; three of us were paying court to this blue-eyed fair-haired girl. But the feelings of my friends, Piotr Monashkin and Basil Morosov, like my own, were confined within very proper limits, and although we were conversant enough with all to do with love the idea of kissing her never entered our heads, and we were content with writing poems to her and thinking out cunning manoeuvres in order to sit next to her in class. Not one of us ever dared tell her of his feelings for her. At the very most, one evening, on our way back from a Pioneer meeting, I ventured to take her arm, and my schoolfellows, I am sure, would have gone no further. Yet what torments of jealousy did I not endure when it seemed to me that from certain indications, certain little smiles, Nina preferred Monashkin. I lost my appetite, I grew thin, and my school work was affected.

Until then I had been a model pupil, always first in history of the Party and geography, second or third in other subjects. But that year, Popov, the former revolutionary, was no longer there and history of the Party was being taught by an ageless, sad-looking woman who confined her lessons to reading us long passages from Stalin and statistics of the five-year plans. (With a great blare of publicity the third had just been launched that year.) Anna Tyrk's lessons exerted a curious soporific effect on me and, for the first time in my life, I found myself unable to reply when called out to the blackboard.

"Strogov, what will be the production figure for steel in our country in 1942?"

Silence.

"You don't know? Tell me something about the Kuzbass scheme, then."

Silence.

"Go and sit down."

With lowered head I returned to my place.

In other subjects as well my work left much to be desired. I was making no progress and losing the good opinion of my school-fellows. For the first time I was not re-elected to the School Magazine committee. The headmaster called my mother into consultation. I do not know how this little crisis in my affairs would have resolved itself if tragic events closely affecting my family had not quickly caused me to forget this first love affair.

My cousins, Yuri and Natasha Strogov, who were some years older than I was, were orphans; they were closely bound by ties of affection. Yuri, a keen athlete and zealous Communist, on leaving school had joined the N.K.V.D. Natasha had recently married a doctor. Suddenly misfortune befell them, one of those tragedies which, until then, I had known of only by hearsay. In the course of an official search the N.K.V.D. had discovered in the room of Natasha's brother-in-law a photograph of the civil war period showing him standing with Trotsky; as a consequence the brother-in-law was sentenced as a counter-revolutionary and deported to a camp in the extreme north. Nothing untoward happened to Natasha and her husband; they were summoned to police headquarters and soon released, but Yuri was debarred from the N.K.V.D. for lack of "vigilance," that is, for not having unmasked on his own so suspect a relation by marriage.

It was a tragedy for the young man. Morally he felt himself tainted, disqualified, for he was, I repeat, a zealous Communist and entirely wrapped up in his work. Materially he experienced near destitution; he had learnt no trade save

that of a policeman, so that he could find work nowhere, particularly as no Russian business would want to take on an ex-N.K.V.D. man (no one knows what troubles might arise later). Yuri only just managed to obtain a job snow sweeping or some other drudgery of that nature. One tragedy leads to another: Natasha who also, God knows why, felt terribly guilty, separated from her husband, fell ill and tried to commit suicide.

Sometimes Yuri came to spend an hour or two with us. He obstinately refused to share our dinner, and at the most would accept a cup of tea; all the evening he remained silent, his eyes cast down, and then suddenly would leave us. I had greatly admired him and was very sorry for him. One evening after he had gone—the others had already gone to bed—I could bear it no longer and spoke to my father.

"What's happened to Yuri isn't fair!" I exclaimed. "All this business about the photograph wasn't his fault, was it?"

"When you're older," replied my father, "you'll understand that the word 'fault' in these matters doesn't mean much. Say, rather, that he has been unlucky. It would have been better for him if it had been Stalin in the photograph."

"But tell me, Father," the question came almost involuntarily to my lips, "is it really true that Stalin was the greatest leader in the civil war?"

My father looked at me kindly, his sad smile playing about his lips.

"All I can tell you, my boy," he replied, "is that at the time I never heard his name mentioned."

Suddenly he lapsed into silence as if he had said too much already. I remember this conversation as if it had taken place yesterday. Of course, by a kind of established convention in our family, as in all Russian families, certain critical remarks were taboo. And here was my father, the man I loved more than any other, daring to speak out like that. In one short sentence he had confirmed my worst fears.

During the following weeks I made no effort to pursue the conversation. But a tacit understanding had grown up between my father and myself, and I think that he knew why I began to make use of his small collection of books.

I experienced at that time a period when with a kind of frenzy I sought to check everything that was taught us about the recent past of our country. Was it all a tissue of lies? What was already obvious to me was that I had to read it in black and white. With what pleasure did I turn up in the columns of *Pravda* for 1920 or 1922 the eulogies of Trotsky. And how many of them were signed by Stalin himself! That was even more surprising. I remember the feeling of triumph when I came across a speech by Stalin, in 1929, in which, quoting Lenin, he spoke of Bukharin in terms of approval and even with a certain enthusiasm.

I mentioned none of all this to anyone.

My obsession did not last long, however; it should be remembered that I was only thirteen at the time. Moreover, the angle had changed both in the newspapers and even in our life at school. The purges were over and "public enemy number one" was no longer the Trotskyist traitor in our midst but international Fascism. Hitler, we were informed, was planning to invade our country and desired to bring us under his barbarous yoke. The newspapers, the wireless, the cinema put before us the horrors of Nazism and its bestial anti-semitism. In spite of my new-found scepticism in the face of official propaganda I succumbed to it once again. Was it because this time it seemed to ring truer? I do not know, but I remember that I wept with anger at the film *Professor Mamlock* and was jubilant at the victory of the Russians over the Teutonic Knights in *Alexander Nevski*. I was well aware of the gigantic lie under which we lived, but I no longer cared as soon as it seemed to me that the great victories of the Revolution were in danger from abroad.

I remember, too, the excitement with which I devoured Feuchtwanger's *The Oppenheims*, the story of a family under the Nazis. Anything that bore the name of a foreign author acquired for us Russians an additional mark of authority. Was it because we knew that foreigners could write in entire freedom? It is indeed a fact that we read a great deal and the works which we prefer are certainly not those of our "official" authors, but either our great classical writers of the nineteenth century—Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy and others (and even Dostoievsky when perchance we can obtain his books)—or else foreign authors of any period, Shakespeare or H. G. Wells, Balzac or Romain Rolland, all of whose works reach an enormous circulation. I shall mention my reading again. My schoolwork progressed somehow or other, and there was a slight improvement over the beginning of the year, for I had forgotten Nina. The study of Russian literature I enjoyed; I kept my place in algebra, and I acquired as well as I could the elements of dialectical materialism that they began to teach us at this time. But I never really succeeded in learning, or even in understanding, this last subject, though, as I have a good memory, I learnt by heart the most important passages in the textbook—those in heavy print—and thus managed to get through.

It was now the summer of 1939. As usual, I spent my holidays with my grandparents. This wonderful summer gave exceptional crops: the thick golden wheat grew as high as a man; in the collective farms all worked hard and sang at their work. The horrors of the terrible years of the Collectivization campaign seemed forgotten. I, too, forgot my "problems." I ate enough for four, besported myself on horseback, and even tried my hand at flirting with the simple-minded, rough farm-women. My voice was breaking; I was becoming a man.

## ARMED VIGIL

How did I hear that war had broken out in the West? I no longer remember. On the other hand I can recall that on returning from my holiday I was struck by the changed tone of our propaganda—and with us propaganda is not a matter of indifference to schoolboys. No longer did we hear of Hitler, the savage, the Fascist barbarian. *Mamlock* and *Alexander Nevski* had disappeared from the hoardings. On the other hand we heard a great deal at this time of our new partner, the Chancellor of the German Reich, at war with the capitalist powers, and of his minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, who had come to Moscow in order to sign a pact of eternal friendship with our country. Photographs depicted him at the airport with Molotov, the head of our government. This shocked me inexpressibly.

We were also informed that by the common desire of their inhabitants our country was enlarged by certain provinces—Poland, Lithuania and Esthonia. The U.S.S.R. contained about fifteen million new citizens and this, on a final analysis, was good news. But was it sufficient to offset the policy towards Germany? I do not think so, especially among us at school, where for the first time I seemed to notice a sneering attitude and veiled allusions to the subject. This attitude became still more clearly marked a few months later when we were told that our country had been attacked by “the Finnish white guard.”

The Finns! Three millions of them! Scarcely the population of Leningrad. Of course we should gobble them up at once and for the first days of the war we all believed it. But the Finns defended themselves like wild beasts, obliging our High Command to mobilize one division after another, and causing many forms of rationing to be brought back again; almost overnight a phrase was coined. It was uttered

without comment—"The number's turned out unlucky." In other words we saw how things were, far more even than we would agree to acknowledge, and were full of admiration for David, so long as David made up his mind to defend himself against Goliath—an example, perhaps, of the state of mind of the citizens of a totalitarian country. All things considered, I really think that the whole affair left on us an unpleasing and even a painful impression.

As we know, the war with Finland was nevertheless fairly quickly settled. Later, the Franco-British disaster in the summer of 1940 made only a faint impression on us, for we were far more nearly affected by what the Russians call the "1940 laws." Since I have been in France it has astonished me to discover that people in that country, however interested in events in the U.S.S.R., know nothing about these laws.

The "1940 laws" are not political: they are laws which affect every citizen of the Soviet Union, however humble, and the humbler he is the more they affect him. They inaugurated a completely military discipline in factories and all the undertakings in our vast country: lateness for work, however slight, was punishable by a fine and, if repeated, by a prison sentence. Moreover, a worker was forbidden to change his work, and managers of factories and other enterprises were authorized to transfer workers from one job to another and from one district to another. Lastly, these laws introduced for boys and girls of fourteen a system of recruitment which decided their future for the rest of their lives. This system was known as the *State Labour Reserve*. Every year a given number of adolescents—several hundred thousand of them—were sent to technical schools without account being taken of their tastes or views on the matter nor of those of their parents. They were made metal workers, miners or railway workers



according to national industrial needs and very rarely were they able to escape from the net.

It was, in fact, nothing else than the industrial conscription of all the citizens of the U.S.S.R. I shall mention later the effect of these laws in the country districts as I observed them in practice. I am right in saying, I believe, that they aroused violent indignation among the young people. But, as always, no one dared to give it expression. I remember trying to raise the matter with a schoolfellow of whom I was very fond: She was the daughter of a famous actor, a "star" in the U.S.S.R.

"Have you seen," I inquired, "that workers who are late are now thrown into prison like thieves? Don't you consider it dreadful?"

To my great discomfort and annoyance she remained silent. A few days later the newspapers announced with a certain amount of prominence that actors who were late for a rehearsal, on being taken to court and found guilty, would be liable to fines or imprisonment. We were already old enough to realize that nothing appeared in our papers by chance and so we understood that it was being made clear in high quarters that actors and intellectuals (in Russia we say "intellectual workers") like ordinary workers were obliged to observe the new laws. Moreover these matters directly concerned us at school: pupils at secondary schools and university students, once their course was finished, could no longer freely choose their profession. They, too, were automatically posted, for two or three years, to an institution or factory, often in some remote region (and the U.S.S.R. is immense). Henceforth most of us were concerned to make preparations for our future: the profession of engineer, held with us in high esteem, now involved the danger of being sent to some great enterprise or factory in Siberia or Central Asia—a pleasing prospect for enthusiasts or those romantically inclined but extremely unattractive to

those among us who were home-loving. Although we were only in the second form these questions formed the subject of much discussion among us. Many of the girls especially, anxious for their future and their chances of marriage, were greatly concerned.

In my own case the choice was already made. I had decided to become a professor of literature: I took great care over my essays, my poems appeared regularly in the school magazine and one of them, "The Red Horseman," in which I commemorated the great ride of Budienny across the Steppes of the Don, obtained first prize in a competition organized by the *Pioneers Journal*. Another poem, "The Orphans of Freedom," which was inspired by the arrival in Moscow of a group of orphans from the Spanish War, was turned down. I was surprised at this, for I thought that it was very fine. Perhaps its theme was already out of favour by 1941. On reflection that now seems possible. In school I was known as "Stiopa the poet." During that last year of peace I worked very hard and came out top of the class. My name was given a place on the school honours list.

## THE GERMAN ATTACK

ONE afternoon towards the middle of May 1941, a long black car drew up in front of our school. Two officers and two civilians got out and went in to see the headmaster. When they had gone he called the caretaker and the bursar and was for a long time in conference with them. Next morning began a great upheaval: the basement was cleaned out from top to bottom, all the coal was carried out into the yard and directly afterwards a team of carpenters started on some mysterious work in the cellars. At home I found out the key to the puzzle: in the institution where my father worked the same preparations had taken place.

"It's Civil Defence," he told me. "They're strengthening the cellars. It looks like war."

Work of the same kind was taking place in all official buildings.

At Moscow that was the only premonitory sign of the war, and soon we thought no more of it. On June 22 the news of the German aggression came like a bolt from the blue. The whole face of the city was changed at one stroke. Suitcases in hand, reservists left to rejoin their regiments; first-aid posts appeared in the principal thoroughfares. That evening an air raid took place and the sky was criss-crossed with tracer bullets, but on that occasion it was only a dummy raid, an exercise carried out by our own Air Force. The general atmosphere was heavy with foreboding and most of the people in the streets showed anxious faces; they had a vague feeling that a great disaster had befallen us. Two or three days later all private wireless sets were confiscated; we no longer needed the wireless, however, to know that the first engagements at the front had turned out as badly as possible for our troops. As always, in the streets and at home, these first defeats were only mentioned very cautiously.

Our High Command soon realized, however, that it was useless to try to hide them from us. I remember very clearly the famous speech made by Stalin scarcely ten days after the outbreak of hostilities when he spoke very frankly to the country about these first defeats, almost justifying them and asking our help. I heard the speech twice: once at school and then, in the evening, at home. "Brothers and sisters," he began. In this unusual manner, and not with "Comrades" or "Citizens," but *brothers and sisters*, did he address us. And he maintained this familiar, intimate tone throughout his speech. "He must have need of us!" I thought, and I was almost moved. It was rather as if a tyrannical and cruel father became human for a second, for

a single moment. I soon discovered that I was not alone in my reaction, for we entered on a period when tongues were loosened and the walls of silence were suddenly thrown down. It did not happen at once, and in the beginning the iron discipline which was imposed on us worked wonders.

The enemy air raids caused no panic. Indeed, our Civil Defence was very well organized, the German bombers did not cause much damage and the bomb craters in the streets were all filled in by next day. In order to deceive the enemy the River Moskova was covered over its entire course with trellis work, a gigantic undertaking the like of which was unknown in London or Berlin. Life went on as usual. But the enemy was coming nearer, one after another the names of towns occurred in the bulletins, Brest-Litovsk, Minsk, and finally Smolensk. I remember a group of my schoolfellows crowded round the school magazine, one of them reading aloud—"the Germans are on the outskirts of Smolensk." I wondered what it implied and what the others thought of it. It was after the fall of this last town, it seems to me, that people dared to speak more freely, criticizing Stalin and blaming him for his mistakes. Why had he had the old fortifications taken down, bringing back the frontier to a line that was indefensible? Why had he signed the pact with Hitler leaving him free to wipe out France so that he could then throw all his weight against us? Imperceptibly, but very rapidly, the infallible guide had become a scapegoat. It hardly needs mentioning that our propaganda was thundering against Nazi barbarism, describing their unspeakable horrors and cruelties, but tired of these continual changes of the "party line" we believed them less and less.

My elder brother was called up and was fighting somewhere on the Leningrad front. I feared for him and hoped, in my inmost soul, that he would not have to die for Stalin. Almost everywhere there was misgiving if not defeatism in

the air. Even if there was no desire for a German victory, here and there you could hear people saying, "The devil is not so bad as he is painted." In general, during these weeks of the autumn the majority of the population of Moscow, crushed by the news, were awaiting their unknown fate in a kind of gloomy resignation.

At the beginning of October, when the Government left Moscow and the evacuation of the large factories commenced, defeatism turned to panic. Fearful rumours started to circulate; I remember a woman in the Underground asserting without contradiction that with her own eyes she had seen Germans in the suburbs. In vain the huge proclamations signed by Stalin and Jukov promised us their constant presence and threatened all panic-mongers with death. Soon afterwards the Underground ceased to run and all its stations but two were closed. About October 10 or 11 we were told at school that we, too, were to be evacuated on October 16. Meanwhile classes were suspended. My father had left the day before with his institute. He managed to take my mother and sister with him and so for a few days I was at home alone. Of those strange and oppressive days my chief memory is of endless processions of people fleeing to the east on their own responsibility, all of them on foot (hardly any in Moscow possess cars). I also remember the incredible scene of a drunken man perched on a barrel haranguing the passers-by. "Men of Russia!" he cried. "Soon Stalin will be shut up in this barrel. Everyone will be able to spit on him and the most worthy citizens will have the right to piss on him." The onlookers were laughing and some went so far as to applaud. A militiaman who came by, seeing what was going on, considered it unnecessary to intervene.

What was the explanation of this lack of restraint and lawlessness? I really believe that the fear, the insidious ever-present fear which plays so important a part in the disciplined

behaviour of the Russians, had for a period lost its inhibitory power and a fear, still more acute, of the foreign invader, of the unknown, had taken its place.

On October 16 our school at full strength, boys and girls, masters and pupils, boarded goods trucks at the Kazan station and left for an unknown destination in the east. Never in my life have I experienced so terrible a journey. Half-starved and with hardly any heating, we took upwards of two weeks in the icy cold to reach our destination, spending more time in the sidings than in travelling, allowing interminable military trains to pass through on their way towards Moscow. Indeed I can tell former prisoners in our concentration camps, Poles or others, whose stories I have been able to read in the West, that except for not being under guard our conditions were scarcely better than theirs. But youth can bear most things, and all these hardships were forgotten in a moment when, having crossed the Urals, we knew that we were drawing near our destination. That evening we arrived at Cheliabinsk and were put up in the secondary school in the town.

We were somewhat cramped, but were given a very warm welcome. A streamer bidding "Welcome to our Comrades from heroic Moscow" had been stretched over the entrance and our Siberian comrades did their best to help us forget the hardships of our journey. They at once organized the collection of warm clothing on our behalf.

## CHELIABINSK

THE two years spent at Cheliabinsk remain in my memory as a dull monotonous period: spartan food, life as a boarder in an immense tumbledown building intended for two hundred pupils and made to hold six hundred. We slept in hastily constructed three-tiered wooden bunks. There were

insufficient blankets and in winter we were sometimes very cold. But the war, seen from Cheliabinsk, seemed remote enough, especially after the German offensive on Moscow had been driven back and in addition to the communiqués from the front I was interested in the news from my family settled at Tashkent in Central Asia. But the post was very irregular.

I worked hard, leaving myself very little leisure. At the outset I had determined to win the silver medal attached to passing the school-leaving certificate with honours. It was still two years off. I threw myself into the work and with increasing enthusiasm as the curriculum gradually developed; less and less emphasis was placed on revolutionary or Marxist matters and increasingly on Russian history, our poets, learned men and generals. In addition we were given certain manual tasks of very varied nature to perform, such as collection of scrap metal in the streets and waste land and even from private houses. I found this a pleasant recreation. On the other hand I categorically refused to join the *komsomol* as we were invited to do in the higher classes. When its representative in the school put me forward for it I used the time-honoured excuse in the U.S.S.R.—“I don’t feel that I am ready for it yet.” Upwards of half of my class, both boys and girls, did the same.

The holidays stand out like patches of bright colour in vivid contrast to the grey background of those years. Our class spent those holidays two years running in the same place, at Chagry, a small collective farm some twenty miles from Cheliabinsk, where we were sent as a school team to help in the work of the fields. I remember our arrival as if it were yesterday. We travelled there by lorry. The countryside was superbly beautiful and indescribably wild. At the edge of a wood stood a few ramshackle huts. A moujik with flowing beard, whose breath stank of raw spirits (*samogon*), was awaiting outside the largest, which

bore the name Sielsoviet (rural council). It was Teliatin, president of the collective farm, who was to take us to our quarters and see that boys and girls were lodged separately, in groups of three or four. In the family where our group was housed the two sons had been called up; the rest of them, our host himself, a white-haired old man, his wife, his daughter-in-law, his daughter and a swarm of children slept higgledy-piggledy above the *pietch* (stove), a practice that I had known hitherto only through the novels of Gogol or Gorki. With welcoming gesture the old man offered us its hospitality.

"You'll be in the warm up there with us," he remarked.

Scared by the promiscuity and vermin we preferred to sleep in the cowshed and thereupon, remembering our Russian classics, called this farm *Tmutarakagn*.<sup>1</sup>

In this way I acquired a closer acquaintance with the life of Russian peasants in the forgotten corners of our enormous country. Chagry, as I remarked, was a small collective farm and I wondered how far collectivization had changed anything in the ancient customs of these peasants. It was true, of course, that those who should have formed the "progressive elements," that is, the younger members of the community, were all absent. In the villages mobilization had thinned out the population far more than in the towns. Only the old men, women and children remained. And for the first time in my life I lived in surroundings in which politics, in the sense in which we understood them, were totally absent—there were neither speeches, manifestations nor parades. On the contrary, the old moujiks, the president with the rest of them, did not scruple to blame the Government, with an outspokenness which astonished us, for the heavy tax burden, and for the compulsory deliveries of wheat, cattle and dairy produce.

"They tell us to supply meat and we have to slaughter

<sup>1</sup> A savage eastern town in Russian mythology.



our cattle. But our cows provide us with the milk and butter that we have to supply. What can we do? All the wisdom of King Solomon couldn't find the answer!" complained Teliatin.

What annoyed the good people of Chagry far more than the taxes was the compulsory service of the young with the *State Labour Reserve*. This measure was the more unpopular since it was then of recent introduction. I remember an enlistment that took place near the *Sielsoviet*, and the tears and cries of the women as their sons and daughters climbed on to the farm carts to be taken to the railway station whence they left for their uncertain future as workers in the industries and mines. These young recruits numbered about thirty. How had they been chosen? I have no idea. But I remember the peasant women complaining loudly of injustice and favouritism and bringing up old grudges and jealousies.

Save for these few incidents life at Chagry was quiet. Although the peasants were rough and ignorant they were honest and simple and we settled down with them very well. Never had I experienced so primitive and so healthy a life. We rose at dawn and spent the whole day in the fields; on returning to our quarters, dead tired, we fell at once into a heavy sleep; we did no more than glance at the newspapers, which arrived very late, in order to see the news from the front.

Our war news at Chagry came to us from an entirely different source. Three or four families of refugees, evacuated from the Ukraine, were lodged there. One of them came from Bielgorod, my grandparents' town, and in the beginning of 1942 had lived for some weeks under German occupation. We learned from them that what our propaganda told us about German atrocities was true, and even less than the truth; we heard of whole villages razed to the ground, of partisans burned alive, of Jews massacred. These people could tell me nothing of my grandparents, but

through them I discovered that a young girl, a member of the *komsomol*, whose family I knew well, had been raped and killed by the invaders. Stories of that nature shed a new light on the terrible war in which my country was engaged and caused the last of my hesitations to disappear. I understood that it was a just war and a necessary one. On some evenings, when our work had not been too hard, I prevailed upon my new friends to tell us of the exploits of the partisans. I was surprised to learn that quite half of them were members of the N.K.V.D., and at once I began to judge that formidable body somewhat less unfavourably. Together we followed on the map the fearful German onslaught on Stalingrad during the summer of 1942 and the German retreat to the Dnieper the following summer.

The interest shown by my friends and myself in these uprooted families gave them a certain pleasure; the peasants, poor as they themselves were, would have nothing to do with these refugees, whom they regarded as parasites, whereas we students represented free labour and, in consequence, were valuable. Personally I succeeded in finding favour with the whole village. The story of how I managed it is worth telling.

A few days after the departure of the recruits for the *State Labour Reserve* two policemen from Cheliabinsk arrived in a jeep to make inquiries at Chagry. Two youths had escaped en route and the police imagined that, as generally happened in such cases, they had returned to hide with their parents. This time, in fact, it had not occurred and they had not been seen in the village, but the policemen would not believe it and threatened to arrest Teliatin. A fierce argument was going on in front of the *Sielsoviet* before the panic-stricken villagers. After a long discussion the senior of the two policemen considered that it was time to put an end to it.

"That's enough of your tales, Comrade Teliatin," he

concluded peremptorily. "You're responsible here, and as the lads aren't in the place, you'll have to come to the town with us."

At that point, to my own great astonishment, I had the effrontery to intervene.

"Citizens, have you a warrant?" I inquired.

The policemen looked at me in surprise.

"Why are you putting your oar in, *klop*?"<sup>1</sup>

I took my courage in both hands.

"I know that I am very young," I went on, "but in Moscow they taught us about Stalin's constitution and that says that no one can be arrested without the procurator's sanction. It is the law of the revolution and it applies to all. To arrest this man you must have a warrant."

It was probably an inspiration on my part to point out that I was from Moscow. In any case the two policemen, nonplussed, and murmuring, "We'll see about that!" went back to their jeep. Nothing more was heard of them. The two young deserters, I later discovered, after spending a week in the woods, gave themselves up of their own accord and were sentenced to six months in a reformatory colony for adolescents.

As a consequence of that incident I became respected and popular in Chagry. I used my popularity to endeavour to alleviate the lot of my friends the refugees. I made a long speech to the villagers explaining to them that our first duty was to mitigate the exile of these victims of Hitler's fury and my eloquence was enhanced by the fact that my patriotism was entirely sincere. I cannot say whether my speech did any good. In any case there was already a new spirit abroad, for it was the summer when, by forced marches, our armies liberated the Ukraine and the refugees were impatiently waiting to return home; we students, too, were hoping that soon we should return to Moscow.

<sup>1</sup> *Klop*: literally, *flea*; used figuratively for *small boy*.

Back in Cheliabinsk again, we found important news awaiting us. At the school we were informed that those among us who passed the school-leaving examination (which was considerably easier owing to war conditions) would be able to return to Moscow and matriculate at the university. At the same time, a letter from my father told me that the institute at which he worked was on the point of returning to the capital; my parents' exile was also coming to an end. I went back to my studies with great eagerness and, three months later, fifteen of us, having secured the precious certificate (which enabled us to obtain the permit from the N.K.V.D.), climbed into a compartment on the train labelled "reserved for students." Just as the journey to Cheliabinsk had been slow and uncomfortable so the return journey was quick and pleasant.

## RETURN TO MOSCOW

It was a great joy to return to Moscow and leave the train at the Kazan station after two years of exile. I found great changes in the city, not on account of the bombing, for it had suffered little damage, but because of a thousand and one unusual little details that were daily to be observed in the streets. Almost everyone was in uniform. Firstly, the women: there were women acting as conductresses on the Underground and on the buses, women railway workers, even women police with a large revolver prominent at their hip. In almost all the public services women were taking the place of men. Among the young people it was rare to see one who was not wearing military uniform and some of them were extremely smart with their large gold or silver epaulets and practically half the chest covered with medals. And—a novelty for us—uniforms from other countries were also to be seen. We were able to observe two kinds of

foreigners. The processions of ragged, emaciated German prisoners whom the passers-by looked on with derision, and the Allies, British or American officers, who were sometimes to be seen flashing past in their gorgeous limousines, French airmen whom we stood to gaze at as they came and went at the Hotel Metropole, who were immensely popular.

The priests in their curious headgear and long cassocks were another novelty as they proceeded slowly on their way along the pavements. Where could they have appeared from after upwards of twenty years' persecution and anti-religious propaganda? We students could hardly believe our eyes and one of the jokes of those days was to assert that they must be suitably disguised former anti-religious propagandists, since it was necessary to find them fresh work of some sort.

Even the young people enrolled in the *State Labour Reserve* had their own uniform. This city in uniform was far more prosperous and better fed than the provinces (the periphery, as we say in Russia). Allied aid was making itself felt at every turn; there were American lorries and jeeps in the streets, tinned foods "made in U.S.A." in the students' canteens, there was a distribution of pullovers and shoes at the University, all the more welcome as they bore the magic label "foreign made." We felt stronger and we felt that we were loved. Our armies were pushing on westwards at an amazing speed (our advance, I calculated on the map, was twice as fast as our retreat in 1941-42), the Second Front, the newspapers assured us, would not be long delayed and the general atmosphere was one of cheerfulness.

At home, too, there was gladness in the air. Chance is an extraordinary thing. Three days after my return ("how tall you've grown, Stiopa, why you're almost a man!"—remarks like that are to be heard all over the world) my brother Michael, the hero of the siege of Leningrad, came

to spend ten days' leave with us, his first since the beginning of the war. He was a subaltern when he left, but had earned promotion and was now a major and his chest was covered with medals. On the evening of his arrival we gave a family dinner party. My contribution to the feast was two tins of corned beef which I obtained at the University canteen; my father, borrowing coupons from his colleagues, came back in triumph with two litres of vodka (our national drink was severely rationed) and tins of fish. My cousin Yuri also came. He was now disabled, pensioned and decorated, his body riddled with wounds, for on the declaration of war he had joined up in the shock troops and was always a volunteer when any dangerous service was in question. He now considered that he had "atoned" for his past.

Seated at this table, spread with rare and precious food-stuffs, how immense was our joy, how many our memories shared together, how great our hopes! It was true, of course, that these hopes were not the same for all; that was clear at the end of the meal when abruptly a fierce argument broke out between us.

It was a harmless remark of my father's which caused the explosion.

"What are you going to do during your leave, Michael?" he inquired.

"I've plenty to do. To-morrow I must see about ordering a new uniform. On my return to Leningrad I shall probably be received by Jdanov. An officer with any respect for himself must have his uniforms made to measure."

"In my day, Michael"—my father sounded a trifle embarrassed—"when we were fighting against Denikin we managed to do our duty without bothering about uniforms. It was our opponents, the Whites, who worshipped epaulets. All this new emphasis on dress means absolutely nothing to me."

"You're a romantic revolutionary, Father," replied Michael with irony in his voice. "Enthusiasm alone is not enough to beat the Germans. You need a well-oiled military machine and soldiers who sense the complete superiority of their officers. Then they obey more blindly. It's a good thing that Stalin has seen this. What should we have done without his wisdom and foresight with his plans and discipline and industrialization?"

"I agree about industry, the tanks and planes," replied my father. "But you are young, Michael, you don't remember the time of the Czars. You've never known Guards' officers who thought themselves Gods, who, because they were wearing epaulets and spurs, were waited on by soldiers whom they treated like serfs. Do you know that when I did my military service I had to clean my lieutenant's boots and sometimes even to take them off for him when he came back drunk at night. I saw too much in my young days not to distrust fine uniforms."

Michael went red in the face.

"I'd rather not discuss these matters with you, Father," he said stiffly. "We are at war and there's only one rule for me: whatever the Government does is well done."

He found an unexpected ally in Yuri, who so far had remained silent.

"You all know," he said suddenly, "what happened to me. I realize that in my youth I did wrong; I know, too, that I have been able to atone for it. Our Government is just and lets everyone have his chance; we must be patient and not argue too much."

I was unable to restrain myself.

"But Yuri," I broke in, "what did you do wrong? Tell us, for once, what exactly were you guilty of?"

"All right my boy," intervened my father, "no one asked you anything. I'll tell you one thing. The past is past, but I believe that we are now on the verge of great changes.

Michael, have you read the agreement signed at Teheran? Even after the war we shall continue to collaborate hand in hand with the Americans. In that way peace will be assured for ever, for who would dare to attack a Russian-American coalition? And if they have much to learn from us we, too, can learn more than a little from them."

"Don't talk to me about Americans!" exploded Michael, who was becoming increasingly excited. "They are all liars and hypocrites with their tales of the Second Front. And, to tell you the truth, I don't at all like the attitude in this house. You live in peace here behind the lines while the Army is bleeding to death and you dare to criticize! You heard the remarks just made by that little brat." (He meant me.)

"Compose yourself, Michael," intervened my mother, obviously worried. "Don't spoil our evening! Let's talk of something else."

My sister cunningly changed the subject.

"Is it true, Michael," she asked, "that all during the siege of Leningrad the Grand Opera stayed open?"

And the conversation turned to the ballet, a favourite topic among Russians. But the atmosphere remained somewhat charged.

I imagine that at this period such discussions were by no means rare in our country when faithful servants of the régime were in contact with those who endeavoured to keep cool heads and use their judgment. Owing to war-time conditions, and contrary to what happens in similar circumstances in Western countries, a certain liberty, or, perhaps, a certain confusion was apparent in people's minds. Precisely because hate of the Germans had produced unanimity, opinions differed far more sharply than hitherto. There were many who, like my father, expected that peace would bring great changes with it—and some freedom.

For my own part, the little quarrel that I have just



narrated upset me considerably. During the few days that he spent with us I was continually observing Michael, the hero of our family, and I noticed with astonishment that nothing seemed further from his thoughts than our great common ideal, the struggle for freedom and a better future for all peoples. Perhaps in my youthful enthusiasm I was too severe and did not realize that too much is not to be expected from a serving soldier. But Michael seemed to think of two things only, his amusements and his career. He had his uniform made to measure all right, specially cut out by the tailor at the officers' club, and before rejoining his unit came to dazzle us at home and all our neighbours.

When lectures began at the University I, too, was obliged to envisage the prospect of being in uniform.

## THE UNIVERSITY

I WAS now a student. In the U.S.S.R. a student's life is not very different from that of a schoolboy. Presence at lectures is compulsory and there are examinations every term. All the same the fact of being a student gave me a private thrill; I felt grown up. I was a man.

At this time there was some question of putting the students into a special uniform. The proposal was postponed only because, so we were told, of the scarcity of cloth and, I must admit, that deep down inside I was not displeased at the prospect of wearing a military looking uniform which would impress the girls. It is true that we were at war. . . .

All the same, the war did not greatly affect the trivial round of our daily lives. Most of us were not old enough for calling-up, though it was always possible to volunteer. In this connection, I was surprised that none of us thought of doing so. Indeed the complete absence of such a natural

impulse among young men was very astonishing. For my own part I was very well aware why I refrained from a heroic resolution of the kind: I loved my country very dearly and would willingly have sacrificed my life for it, but the idea of dying for Stalin filled me with little enthusiasm. As for my fellow students I could only fall back on my own suppositions regarding the reason for their listlessness in this respect, especially as among them were to be found some convinced Stalinists (knowledge of such things is almost instinctive) who worshipped the "Father of his People" with their whole hearts and not only with their lips. Yet from 1943 to 1945 I never encountered one, among the hundreds of students that I knew, who volunteered for the front, nor did I hear of a single case. I must admit that even now the reason for this extraordinary absence of initiative baffles me. It was certainly not due to lack of the military virtues among the Russians; the last war is sufficient proof of the contrary. In this connection there are gaps in the information current in the West, where people have never heard of the companies of Russian soldiers who made up their minds to die at their posts (*stoim na smierti*) and with the permission of their commanding officer stood firm to the last man. This kind of voluntary heroism was, I can confirm, entirely spontaneous. But it occurred in the heat of battle, at the front. To volunteer to go to the front was extremely rare. The only instance that I know was that of two medical students who were mixed up in a black-market case and contrived in that way to avoid the severe punishment which awaited them. I should add, too, that I have heard the head of our faculty scolding a student who was guilty of some act of indiscipline.

"I shall have you sent to the front," he threatened. It all seems contradictory, but it is a fact and, so far as I am concerned, it remains entirely incomprehensible. I should add that none of us felt any twinges of conscience on that score,

not even those who, having attained the age of twenty-one, should have been called up and were reserved by reason of their matriculation at the University, for the State was careful to safeguard the future intellectual *élite*. I remember a tall fellow exclaiming with astonishment—"Isn't it funny, in peace-time I should have been in the Army, and because there's a war on I am still at the University!"

To return to my studies. While I was at Cheliabinsk I had complied with all the formalities necessary for inscription in the Faculty of Letters and had received my student's "card," a sort of booklet with several pages, not unlike a passport. One fine day in October 1943, with this precious document in my pocket, for the first time I set out for our venerable Alma Mater, the oldest university in Russia, which at that time occupied buildings right in the centre of the city, opposite the United States Embassy. (It was only in 1948 that it moved to its new premises in the suburbs.) The quadrangle and corridors were crowded with hundreds of young men and women, freshmen like myself, all looking for their lecture room, their professor or their laboratory. At first this crowd seemed to me merely a formless mass and it was only gradually that I came to pick out the various elements that made it up. There were the students from Moscow, often the children of intellectuals, surer of themselves and with nimbler minds, those from the provinces, sons of collective farmers on the banks of the Volga, of miners in the Urals or from farther off still, whose scholarships enabled them to escape from the dull monotony of their native province and aspire—so long as they passed their examinations—to the envied career of engineer or to an important post in the Government service; lastly, there were the ex-soldiers and wounded, often bemedalled, whose sad expressions seem still to reflect the horrors that they had recently experienced and who were shown particular attention and respect.

I found a place fairly easily in the lecture hall where the Russian Literature course was given, for it was less crowded than the others. As I believe I have already pointed out, there is a certain hierarchy in Russian universities whereby technical subjects and exact sciences are placed first in order of importance followed by medicine; the humanities are little frequented. Thus for some of my fellow students I had a certain number of "throw-outs" from other faculties. Eventually I became friendly with one of them, Andrew Gurevitch, a war hero, decorated with the Order of Surovov, whose Jewish origin prevented his being accepted at the School of Diplomacy. (This rule, though new, was almost absolute. The only Jew admitted to this institution was, it was whispered, a certain Ginsburg, the son of the Minister of Building Supplies. After 1943, or 1944, Jews were not allowed to enter the military academies, the diplomatic or consular service, or the N.K.V.D. This bar, which greatly annoyed us, was applied very discreetly and no order to that effect was issued publicly.)

As I have mentioned, our studies were very much like those in the higher classes at school. The syllabus was very full, far fuller, I should think, than those of French students. In addition to the inevitable portions of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin that we were obliged to mull through, we followed courses in psychology and sociology (taught, of course, from the Marxist angle); our national classics from Pushkin to Gorki formed, of course, the principal matter of our studies, but we were also obliged to master foreign literatures with some thoroughness, and two professors shared this subject between them.

One of them, Pereversev, was a specialist in English literature. He brought much enthusiasm and devotion to his task, and evinced a far more liberal spirit than might be imagined (it is true, of course, that I am speaking of a time before the great "intellectual" purge of 1947), and even

nowadays I believe that I know the various authors, from Swift to Aldous Huxley, Edgar Allen Poe, Steinbeck, Dos Passos or others, far better than most Western students. When I read in 1953 that twelve out of twenty American students did not know who wrote *Vanity Fair* and that nineteen of them could not say the author of *Tom Jones*, I could assert with certainty that in our year there were few to whom Thackeray or Fielding was unfamiliar.

The second professor, Sobolev, was responsible for the other foreign literatures, German, Scandinavian and especially French. There again, I believe, I could compete with many French students on the subject of Balzac or Victor Hugo; not that I consider myself particularly learned, far from it, but merely that the level of studies, at least so far as the accumulation of facts was concerned, was very high.

From the outset I was a hard-working student bent on achieving my aim. My great ambition was to be accepted, after a three years' course of regular studies, as an "aspirant." Since this institution exists only in U.S.S.R. I must say a few words about it. The best students, those whose aggregate marks were the highest, were sent as a matter of course to a school for higher studies whose pupils became automatically university professors, even if they had not yet obtained their doctorate. To be appointed an "aspirant" was not only a high honour but brought with it very appreciable material advantages. The grant allotted to an "aspirant" was twice that of a student.

Morning and afternoon I went to lectures; almost every evening I went to work at the Lenin Library even when it was necessary, as it was sometimes, to queue for two hours to obtain a place. My special subject was American Literature, which was held in particular esteem at the time since they were then our faithful and gallant allies. I can still remember my first essay on which Pereversev congratulated

me warmly. It was entitled "Theodore Dreiser, leader of the American progressive school." I did not fail to bring out the obviously close relationship between the style and work of the master and the stage of accumulation of capital experienced by the U.S.A. at the end of the last century. Certain views that I formulated in this essay still appear to me as very reasonable. On the other hand, my professor found fault with another study in which I endeavoured to show Shakespeare as a product of the enrichment of the Elizabethan age and the piracy of Walter Raleigh and his confederates. Possibly he considered that my views were almost sacrilege in reference to this universal genius. But I am afraid that my reader may find all these details somewhat boring so I shall pass on at once to my life as a student, my amusements and my loves.

## THE LIFE AND LOVES OF A RUSSIAN STUDENT

JUST before leaving Cheliabinsk I made the acquaintance of a girl who, like me, had just passed her examinations and had been able to obtain a grant in order to study medicine at Moscow. Slim and dark, Marina attracted me and I suggested that we should meet again in the capital; she gave me the address of a students' hostel where she was going to stay.

One fine Sunday morning, I decided to go and look her up. At the address that she gave me, 16 Serpukhova Street, I could find nothing like a students' hostel and it took me some time to discover that the church in front of me was used as a dormitory for a few hundred girls. Timidly I pushed my way in. The nave had been completely transformed and was buzzing like a hive whose cells consisted of cubicles formed by sheets and blankets hung on cords. Each

cubicle housed two girls, who thus enjoyed a certain privacy together, but it was only a visual privacy, for these screens allowed every word to be heard. Thin straw mattresses were used for beds and suitcases or trunks for furniture. In extreme embarrassment I made my way down the central corridor asking those whom I encountered if they could inform me which was my friend's cubicle. Some told me that she was to be found at the other end of the room, others sent me to look for her in a side corridor. I had to describe Marina's appearance and mention that she came from Cheliabinsk and was studying medicine. In the end I was successful. This curious excursion was an extremely disagreeable experience for me. Fortunately, Marina was there; as quickly as I could I called her out from her cubicle and asked her to meet me in the street.

People in Moscow are accustomed to overcrowding and to the hardships of the homeless. Nevertheless I was shocked.

"How can you live and work like that," I asked her, "as bad as the beggars under the bridges?"

Calmly she reminded me that the country was at war and that our brothers, both hers and mine, who were at the front, experienced far worse conditions. We took the trolley-bus and I showed Marina the widening of Gorki Street, which was then in progress, a technical *tour de force* of which all of us in Moscow were very proud. Rather than destroy those houses which projected too far, for certain of them were of great historical interest, it had been decided to move them back by placing beneath their foundations huge metal rods on which the buildings were made to slide, as if on rails, three or four inches every day, without even disconnecting electricity or water. It was a technical feat which, I believe, has not been equalled anywhere else.

"There, Marina," I remarked, "we've already caught up and passed the Americans. Our engineers are the best in the world."

"It's worth while suffering a little, then," she replied gently, "and tightening our belts until our living conditions improve."

In regard to our country and to Communism, which amounted to the same thing, we were both patriots. Still, I believe that Marina, naïve and straight from the provinces, had not (or at least had not yet) seen through the lies and pretence that are part and parcel of the Soviet system. She was a good, straightforward, hard-working, loyal girl but cast in a simple mould.

I need hardly say that I never ventured with her on the dangerous ground of politics. Our conversation was confined to the subjects usual among young Russians, that is, to our work and our country. I also spoke to her about literature and art, but these subjects scarcely interested her, for all her thoughts were on her future as a doctor. We met frequently and I sometimes saw her back to her church-hostel, though later on she was able to move from there to less extraordinary quarters—a hostel reserved for women medical students.

Externally our relationship was one of simple friendship. She was one of those girls whom we call in Russia "all or nothing," that is, marriage or comradeship. I sometimes wondered whether I loved her and I began to think so on the day that she invited me to accompany her to the White Snow ballet at the Grand Theatre, for which she had managed to obtain two tickets. With us, procuring tickets for the Grand Theatre is no small matter; Marina must have queued all night to get them and I had some grounds for seeing her action as a proof of her love for me. Now that I am more mature I realize that I was moved and secretly flattered at the idea of being loved but that I was not in love. Probably I felt this instinctively at the time, for I took good care to refrain from any declaration or action that might be misunderstood and our relations remained entirely platonic.



Marina's invitation to the theatre was quite an event in my life. I wonder if it is realized how important a part the theatre plays in the life of the Russians. Every evening a long queue forms up at the entrance awaiting the opening of the box office the next morning. It is of small importance that it should be raining or that the thermometer stands at twenty degrees below zero. Others crowd round the stage door. There, too, "fans" wait for hours merely to obtain a glimpse for an instant or two of their idols. A new play forms the subject of conversation for days, but it is our classics, the tragedies of Ostrovski or Chekhov, the operas of Glinka or Mussorgski, and especially the ballet, our national pride, which arouses the enthusiasm of audiences. That is hardly astonishing. Not only is our theatre good—the best in the world, as indeed are our orchestra and artistes—but our lives are not particularly well provided with entertainments. Our production of films is not very abundant and they are generally devoted to the great public works, mines or collective farms, in short, to the glory of the régime, so that they are all alike, or else are plays or operas that have been filmed. We see only three or four foreign films a year. Obviously they are then films like *Modern Times*, *Sous les toits de Paris*, or *Clochemerle*, which portray life in capitalist countries in the blackest colours. Our newspapers, our reviews, even when they do not mention politics, are sententious and monotonous and our whole existence is very grey and drab. It is hardly astonishing, therefore, that the theatre forms our favourite entertainment. In addition, sport plays an important part in the life of the young; we enjoy football, basketball, and especially the winter sports of ski-ing and skating, which are practised with enthusiasm throughout a winter which, it should be remembered, lasts with us for nigh on five months.

I am straying from the subject of my "love" of Marina, though the reader will have understood clearly that in that

case there was no question of love—merely a few friendly walks through the streets of Moscow or in the Park of Rest and Culture. Gradually our meetings became rarer, especially after I had received my initiation in love-making. I must at this point confess my indebtedness to the young cashier at the Grand Theatre who was willing to act as my instructress, although I am well aware that her kindness to me was dictated more by the behaviour of her husband than by the attraction of my modest person.

I made her acquaintance in the Underground where, as good luck would have it, she had left a parcel on the seat, thus enabling me to speak to her. Thereafter she made things easy for me, taking the initiative, and three days later, beneath a radiant sky, I underwent my apprenticeship in a cornfield outside Moscow. Discovery in Moscow of a place for the prosecution of passing affairs of this nature is more difficult than to obtain a flat. Our liaison lasted only a short time. I left Moscow for my holidays and when I returned she had made peace with her husband. I saw her only once afterwards and I was given my *congé* without it upsetting me unduly.

Back in Moscow, during that glorious year of 1944-45, which was the second of my university career, I came to know her who remains in my memory as the most wonderful love of my life. Her name of destiny was Luba (*Beloved* in English) and that one word summed up for me her every quality. She was tall and fair and well-rounded—a typical Russian beauty. She came from the banks of the Volga and that year was taking the same courses at the University as I was. With her I could talk about literature and recite my poetry without fear of arousing, as I did with Marina, merely polite interest. From general subjects of conversation we soon came to an exchange of confidences. We told each other our life stories and quite early on Luba informed me that she was not free; that did not mean that

she was engaged, for a solemn promise of the kind is non-existent in Russia, but before coming to Moscow she had given her word to a childhood's friend, who was called up in the tank corps. This information did not upset me unduly, for I certainly felt that it was my right not to take it too seriously. We arranged to sit next to each other at lectures; we went for walks together; together we experienced the victories of that unforgettable year.

The inevitable declaration of love was not long in coming. On that day we had gone to see the great exhibition of war trophies which had been opened on the banks of the River Moskva. Chatting happily we strolled past the interminable lines of Panthers and Tigers, the heavy guns and mortars, the planes with swastikas on their under-wing. Suddenly I noticed that Luba's face had clouded over.

"Perhaps it was that one," she remarked, pointing to the wreck of a Messerschmidt, "that shot down my brother."

I noticed a tear at the corner of her eye. Her elder brother, whom she adored, had been killed in a dog-fight at the beginning of the war. She told me once that I was like him. All I could do was to squeeze her hand affectionately; it was she, under the influence of emotion, perhaps, who took the initiative and told me that she loved me. That was a day that neither of us will forget; but our mutual declarations by no means effaced the memory of her childhood's friend.

"Ivan is at the front," she remarked. "I must keep my word and wait for him, but once I am married I shall be able to let you share me with him."

Thus does the modern Russian girl settle a difficult love affair. In the circumstances, then, it would have been boorish of me to insist further. For some weeks longer our relations continued as in the past. Then came the day when we undertook the favourite excursion among the citizens of Moscow, a visit to the Moscow Lake, an immense

artificial reservoir on the Volga-Moscow canal which had been completed shortly before the war.

We took the trolley-bus to Chimki, the new river port that I had seen at the time of its inauguration but which Luba knew only from photographs. It was extremely hot for the time of year. The four lines of trees in the magnificent Lenin avenue passed before our eyes, allowing us to glimpse here and there great buildings—blocks of workers' flats, institutes and laboratories—in their imposing modern architecture. There was nothing of the cubism about them which characterized the buildings of 1920-30; everywhere one noticed the concern for embellishment, cornices and bas-reliefs and small Gothic turrets. The enormous building of the river station at Chimki is built in the same neo-Soviet style; it was there that our trolley-bus put us out. Each canal lock, each electric sub-station, evinced the same concern for detail, and there also were to be seen portraits of Stalin, for the Volga-Moscow canal is no ordinary canal, just as the Moscow Underground railway is no ordinary Underground; it is a hymn to work and to the glory of our country and of its almighty master.

We embarked on the pleasure-steamer *Viacheslav Molotov*, to make the popular trip along the canal. The port was full to overflowing with enthusiastic young people; soon arose the strain of songs in unison, of those songs which permeate our whole life; Luba and I joined our voices with the others. The green banks passed slowly by us and my heart was full of inexpressible contentment and joy. I was proud of my companion and of myself, of my people who had just brought to naught a hated enemy and could at the same time construct such marvellous technical masterpieces, I was proud indeed, as if the canal were my own achievement.

Thinking now of that wonderful day I have to admit to myself that I was by no means ignorant of the way in which the bed of the canal had been dug out and of the fact that

the bones of thousands of forced labourers, victims of the great Purge, were lying there literally beneath the water. But as Pushkin, our great national poet, puts it:

*To the sober truth we prefer  
The untruth which raises us up. . . .*

On our return to the port we decided to take a walk in the surrounding countryside. Arm in arm we made our way through the fields shimmering green in the spring sunshine, we recited poetry together, we discussed our future plans, finally we lay down in the grass and I placed my head on my beloved's shoulder. Suddenly I felt her lips on mine. Almost certainly things would have gone far between us that day had we not heard something move quite near to where we lay. Looking round we saw behind a tree a grey form and the peak of a cap. Obviously we were observed. The spell was broken. We got to our feet and continued our walk, our hearts a trifle heavier.

Life in Russia certainly does not smile on lovers. In a Western country that evening I should have taken my conquest to a hotel or we should have met again in my room or hers. None of these solutions was available to us in Moscow, for Luba lodged in a hostel and I slept in the dining-room of our tiny flat; the few hotel rooms were reserved for duly accredited civil servants on duty visits to the capital.

In these conditions it was only on the following Sunday that Luba became mine. That memorable event took place in an old cemetery, dating probably from last century, where among the crosses and ruined mausoleums we were able at last to be alone. Right to the end of our liaison the flame that burned within me encountered many obstacles. Sometimes we went on long walks to the country, and sometimes we took advantage of an afternoon when by

chance there was no one in our flat. Soon, however, complications arose. Luba received a telegram informing her that Ivan, her childhood's friend to whom she was promised, had been seriously wounded and evacuated to a hospital in the Ukraine. She left at once to be with him. When she came back—the armistice had already been signed—she told me with delight that her friend's convalescence would be long and that after it he expected to be posted to one of the great works at Kazakhstan, so that there would be no obstacle to our love-making for many months. This news caused me to love her more than ever, but I believe that at the same time I began to despise her a little. While she continued to lavish on me the proofs of her love she continued to correspond with Ivan. She left to join him two years later. Owing to a certain weariness that I was beginning to experience the separation was less bitter than I expected, but my feelings were painful enough to play their part in a decision which I took at this time and which has enabled me to write this diary.

## HIGH HOPES

THOSE were wonderful months which followed the armistice in May 1945. In the first place our food began to get better. The severe rationing which had been in force during the war was gradually lightened and, if the actual ration of various foods remained exceedingly small, a "parallel" market enabled those who possessed the means to buy additional supplies. This was a kind of legal Black Market—black because its prices were fifteen or twenty times higher than those of rationed goods sold in exchange for coupons; legal, because it was officially authorized and controlled. On the one hand the collective farmers could now come and sell the produce of their private fields or poultry runs in the

cities and, on the other, throughout the country a chain of shops provided without ration coupons the same products at prices only slightly higher than those demanded by the peasants, thus allowing the authorities to control these prices and to lower them if necessary. It was an ingenious system and I recommend it strongly to Western economists, though, of course, equality of nourishment went by the board. Those who were unable to afford making use of the "parallel market" contrived to manage by other means. The same sort of thing happened, I believe, in France during the German occupation. Thus tobacco, sugar and other coupons were sold. The coupons for a whole monthly ration usually fetched a thousand roubles, the equivalent of an ordinary wage for two months.

Certain families had the good fortune to have other assets at their disposal. These were those of which a member belonged to the occupation troops, especially in Germany. They could count on receiving a continual stream of parcels containing the most diverse objects—clothes, cooking utensils, children's toys, dictionaries, almost anything. The entire contents of many German houses were sent back by some clever fellows who managed to obtain the use of military lorries returning empty. Wrist watches were the most sought-after trophy and a soldier who had not succeeded in obtaining one would have felt really disgraced. Such things formed the concrete symbols of our victory and they also enabled many families to balance their budget. With us, it was obviously my brother Michael who provided treasures that were very valuable since his rank of major allowed him to obtain personal booty, sometimes to a sensational sum. I received a wrist watch, and that was considerable enough, but my mother was sent a diamond brooch. Michael explained in his letter that he had not obtained it by force—which would have been theft and incompatible with his honour as a Russian officer—but by

a sale concluded in due and proper form, the final step in a series of negotiations in which vodka, cigarettes and all sorts of other goods were comprised. (It seemed to me that my brother, since he belonged to the occupation forces, for an ardent Communist had become a clever dealer.)

Thus, very slowly it is true, living conditions became easier in Russia. Our morale was high indeed. It was not surprising. The fearful butchery was over; there was no longer any need to fear continually for the life of a brother or a friend, and how proud we were, how glorious it was to see the tyrant who had made the whole world tremble, who had brought France to slavery and very nearly made England bow the knee, beaten by our own forces and almost by them alone. At this period I believe that no Russians, even those in one of our formidable labour camps, did not share in some degree this legitimate national pride.

Nowadays the political conversations that occurred between students in those already far-off days seem to me curious indeed. I ought to say that in these exchanges there was no question of that expansionist imperialism that some people in the West seem to fear so greatly. Even if we had no doubt whatever of the final victory of Communism, we made no plans for the world and, showing a realist outlook, we did not envisage an era of peace and indefinite happiness. The tendencies and views in evidence among us should be seen against the background of the "party line" in international affairs at that period; for the time being it satisfied even the most critical minds. We learnt, in fact, that President Roosevelt, who had just died, was a great man and a great democrat. For several days the newspapers were full of his obituary notices. Behind his portrait stood the picture of a hard-working and egalitarian American people, a picture that we were only too ready to accept since it



agreed with the idea of the Americans held by the Russians for a century. Henceforth America was without doubt to be for us the loyal ally of the future; the pessimists, those who feared further wars, were more distrustful of the intrigues of eternally treacherous Albion, but in this connection there was great hope in the wisdom and political cunning of Stalin. It was said that he would always contrive to see us through and this confidence that was reposed in him was by no means feigned, for he had guided us surely through terrible disasters and had won the day. At this period of high hopes most of the reproaches that many of us held against him in the depth of our hearts seemed forgotten.

I belonged resolutely to the optimistic party. I saw the future in rosy colours and I seriously contemplated the possibility of being able to go abroad very soon. Of course, what I envisaged was a strictly legal journey; I was convinced that administrative difficulties would soon be lifted and that I should be able to undertake a long journey by joining up as a sailor or stoker on some liner going to San Francisco or Vancouver. My youthful imagination was particularly attracted by the Pacific coast. In addition, while my liaison with Luba went on much as before, I became increasingly keen on literature. I wrote poetry, some of which was published, I took an active part in our students' literary circle, and I even set about writing a long novel, the plot of which shows, I think, the state of our minds at that time. For that reason I shall give here a short epitome of it.

My novel concerned an American airman obliged to bale out somewhere over the German-occupied Ukraine. He finds shelter at a small farm, joins forces with the inhabitants of the village, starts working with them, takes part in the life of the community and learns Ukrainian. The fair-haired American falls in love with a Ukrainian girl, a black-eyed,

hot-blooded young woman, of mixed Greek and Ukrainian extraction. In spite of all his efforts the girl remains indifferent to him. He is reduced to despair, but not so greatly that at a collective farm meeting he cannot put forward a valuable suggestion concerning a new method of sowing wheat on rocky ground similar to that which he had observed in his native Kentucky. This assistance enables the farmers to increase the yield of their land threefold. At this point his beloved falls into his arms—from the very first day she was attracted by him but her pride prevented her loving a foreigner, sheltered out of charity, whereas now he had become a useful and productive member of the community. At this juncture the action of the story was intensified by the introduction of a German attack; soldiers were ordered to burn everything to the ground in the territory that they were on the point of leaving. My hero from Kentucky now distinguishes himself as a clever partisan leader. I guided my tale through fires, slaughter and suffering to the traditional happy ending.

I wrote my novel straight through in about four or five months. I was very proud of my work and directly I had concluded it I sought out one of the readers for the State publishing combine, Theodore Ivanov, whom I knew slightly. On two or three occasions he had been present at meetings of our literary society and had helped over the publication of verses that I had written. Ivanov gave me a kindly welcome—"we need talented young men," he remarked—and promised to read my manuscript carefully without delay. Four or five weeks later, as I had heard nothing, I decided to go and see him. This time his kindness seemed to have vanished. Somewhat curtly he informed me that my novel was not fit to be published.

"And what about the party, young man?" he asked me. "What about our great party which during the war inspired resistance to the enemy and electrified the masses? Nowhere

do you mention its untiring activity. Only once, quite by chance, do you sketch the portrait of a Communist!"

I left his office astonished and crushed. So far I thought that I was well aware of what should be said and what should not be mentioned, and many other books were published every month at that time which might well have incurred the same reproaches. The fact was, I can now see, that the wind had already changed in high places. Soon, moreover, we experienced more tangible proofs of this.

As a result of this disappointment a journey abroad filled my thoughts more than ever. Just then many engineers and officials were being sent to Germany. Among them were certain students of my acquaintance from the engineering faculty who were expected to make themselves familiar with German industry. It occurred to me to invoke the influence of my brother Michael in order that I, too, should be sent there on some job or other; just recently he had informed us that he was coming home on leave.

It was, I remember, on January 1, 1946, that Michael burst into our flat, very impressive in his brand-new long cape, his chest displaying a few more medals than last leave. He was now a lieutenant-colonel and gave evidence of a certain self-satisfaction in telling us of the importance of his position on the shores of the Baltic and the large expanse of territory over which his word was law.

"And d'you know," he remarked with some pride, "it's a German baroness, a real 'von und zu' with a name of five syllables, whom I employ as my cook!"

All the same, it gradually emerged from what he told us that some things were worrying and indeed upsetting him, for all that he was the communist of steel, sure of himself and supremely self-satisfied. In particular this:

"We are the conquerors," he told us in a puzzled voice, "and they are the conquered, and yet the conquered often live better than the conquerors."

And they did so in spite of the bombing that they suffered, in spite of the demolitions, in spite of all the misfortunes which had befallen what had once been the Third German Reich. I understood, I think, that this state of affairs caused him anxiety principally because of the bad effect that it had on the morale of the troops in his charge. Even the stupidest among them could, with their own eyes, compare the standard of European life with ours and so have certain proof of the barefaced lies of our official propaganda.

For all my criticism of him Michael made a considerable impression on me; I was almost afraid of him. Perhaps in some obscure fashion I was jealous of him. Certainly I was very clumsy in asking him the question that was on my mind.

"Michael, I want to do something useful," I remarked. "Isn't there some way in which I could come and help you in Germany this summer?"

I had called down a fine tirade on my head.

"In the first place I can't do anything about helping you to come. But even if I could, I would do nothing. We've no room for tourists and we don't want intellectuals. What we need are technicians and men with 'go.' Because he has a brother who served his country well and has got on, Comrade Stephan thinks that he can enjoy a trip abroad. Silly kid!"

It was possibly as a result of this rebuke that the idea of leaving the country secretly took root in my mind. At first it was the vaguest of plans. But the months passed and there seemed no sign of the lifting of any of the innumerable prohibitions weighing down the life of Russians. On the contrary the Press suddenly changed its tone. On the publication of the Marshall Plan, the Americans, lately our loyal allies, were called "The imperialists across the Atlantic." The illusions which my father and I cherished, and they were not confined to us, that after the war some of the

restrictions would be lifted and that the bonds between nations would be more closely knit, were now shattered at a single stroke.

Lastly, at the end of the crucial year of 1946 occurred a further distressing event. I refer to the official pillorying of the well-known authors Anna Akhmatova and Zochtekenko by Jdanov; they were denigrated as formalists and decadents and much else besides.

The whole affair produced consternation among us in the arts department of the University. Very cautiously and with considerable embarrassment, the students discussed the news in whispers, Akhmatova and Zochtekenko were our favourite authors, and the former's poems were recited at the meetings of our literary society. Then, too, during the war many conscripts had slipped a copy of her works into their haversack. And now it was required of us to hold that she and our national humorist were both tainted with the bourgeois outlook; that, in fact, they were decadent as was declared by the inexorable manifestoes that had to be signed.

Accustomed to these sudden excommunications, Russians have made a general rule to avoid discussion of these distasteful subjects. A Russian proverb says, "Don't mention rope in the home of a man who has been hanged." But this time the affair affected us too closely and our indignation and sorrow, although not expressed aloud, could nevertheless be read in the eyes of all. My own reaction was one of combined disgust and caution and as a result from that time onwards I wrote no more poetry and gave all my time to my work. Foreign lands were continually in my thoughts, but I was working extremely hard and managed without difficulty to pass the terminal examinations as they occurred. This was my last year but one, and I was already setting about collecting matter for my thesis which, I hoped, would ensure my acceptance as an "aspirant."

## DECISION

CURIOSLY enough it was this work for my thesis which, by opening fresh perspectives to my mind, prompted me finally to leave my native land. My interest in English authors of the Renaissance period led me to choose as the subject of my thesis, "Thomas More and the Utopia of peace in sixteenth-century Europe"—a subject which my professor, Pereversev, considered extremely interesting but difficult.

"You will have to read a great deal," he recommended, "in modern authors as well. Re-read the philosophical passages in Lenin, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau will be a help also."

I did not fail to do so and seeking, on the other hand, to discover how the idea of universal peace was treated by contemporary authors I made a careful study of the works of John Stuart Mill, Spencer and Gandhi. In Russia, unlike other citizens, intellectuals, especially when they know foreign languages, enjoy the practical possibility of becoming familiar with heretical ideas of all kinds. In the university libraries control is far less strict than elsewhere and the choice of books in all languages is far more varied. It should be pointed out in passing that this fact alone may well explain the public obloquy to which our newspapers periodically hold up the intellectuals—"a certain portion of our intelligentsia," as they put it, "who are incapable of resisting the seductions of the bourgeois mentality and bow down before it."

I belonged, of course, to this accursed class. In any case certain ideas of the celebrated Hindu thinker attracted me. I tried to think for myself and I came to the conclusion that everything would be simplified if the peoples of the world

agreed together to put an end to war. All that was necessary, I told myself, was for a free referendum to be held throughout the whole world. Who, in that case, would dare to vote against peace? It was true, of course, that such an idea was in direct contradiction to the very principles of our traditional teaching, according to which force alone caused the world to progress and produce new forms of society. But here precisely Marxist teaching enabled me to glimpse a solution to this antinomy, since it teaches us that everything is true for a given period and for it alone. From this principle I managed to draw several inferences. Thus—I told myself—at the time that Marx and Engels drew up the Manifesto of 1848 men were sold into slavery, like beasts of burden, in America as well as in Russia, a practice that would be unimaginable in our days just as in a hundred years' time it will be unbelievable that a man should work for another and sell him the produce of his labour. In consequence, my argument proceeded, since human judgments are essentially relative, varying from one century to another, certain views held by Marx may also be no longer true in our days. In that case, I concluded, perhaps the ideas that I found in Gandhi are no longer Utopian after the slaughter of the last imperialist wars. Perhaps the peoples of the whole world are now sufficiently aware of realities to agree together freely on a common parliament or one sole government in spite of differences of social systems or national customs. Here I shall say no more of my ideas which I cherish at the present time just as much as I did formerly (that is why some of my friends think me slightly mad). For, from the outset, directly these ideas took shape, I felt it necessary to communicate them to others. It can hardly be necessary to state that in Moscow such a course was impossible any thought of doing so would have been quite absurd. I could not even reveal my thoughts to members of my family or to my closest friends. I was not unaware, how-

ever, that in Western countries I should be free to preach them to all comers. Thus my former eagerness for travel and escape was strengthened by my desire for free expression and to be able to say what I had to say. A firm intention to put my plan into action was combined with my youthful spirit of adventure.

In this way my resolution took shape. Yet it must not be thought that it was easy for me. In the first place there were the frightful risks attached to my undertaking, risks that I realized to the full since I had before me the fearful example of five of my fellow students belonging to the Academy of Highways and Bridges who, in the summer of 1946, decided to "choose freedom" and, taking advantage of a journey to the Trans-Caucasus for research purposes tried to cross the Persian frontier. They were caught by the frontier guards, brought back to Moscow under escort and sentenced to many years in a labour camp. Obviously I felt no desire to spend the best years of my life working down a mine in the farthest north. Even the idea of a successful escape was fraught with extremely unpleasant consequences for me. It meant leaving my family and my friends, drawing down on their heads, perhaps, disagreeable reprisals, giving up a career which I considered promising in a country that was dear to me—all that was not easy. Of course, I should never have made up my mind if my natural optimism and my faith as a Communist had not inspired in me the hope that separation would only be temporary, and that in a few years the political evolution of Western Europe on the one hand and the alleviation of the severity of the Soviet system on the other would lead to the abolition of the "Iron Curtain," and enable me as a result to return to my own country with my head held high. (One day I hope to be able to do so and see my relations again; I have had no news of them since 1947.)

The final parting with Luba, to whom, at least sensually,



I was attached, even though I no longer felt the attraction of the earlier days with her, also played its part. It was, however, the death of my mother, which occurred at the beginning of 1947, that led me to take the decisive step. I was very much upset and felt her loss considerably and at the same time I felt as if I were freed from a great burden. Although, unlike Russian soldiers who escape to foreign countries, civilians do not automatically let loose on the heads of their families (even when they are ignorant of the facts) the penalties of the law, there is a kind of moral disgrace which falls on the family of one who has escaped and many disagreeable consequences may follow from it. To my mother, who was of a timid and anxious disposition, my departure would have been a severe shock; coupled with the pain of losing me would have been the fear of reprisals on those who remained. After her death I had only to think of my father, but his position as a technician of importance seemed to place him in a safe position. At the worst, I told myself, Michael would be able to help him in case of difficulty. After all, it was my father who, when I was a child, taught me always to hearken to the voice of duty. Now, after long consideration my decision was made; of course it was an absurd one and, according to Russian ways of thinking, quite mad and yet perhaps it was not quite so mad after all since it now enables me to write this account for my Western readers.

I had now to carry my decision into effect. But my plan of campaign forms part of my journey, of the six weeks' "hitch hike" from Moscow to Paris which I undertook in the summer of 1947. This I describe in the third part of this book since before doing so I should like to cast a farewell glance on my beloved country, as it was when I knew it and as it still is; and offer the reader a picture of Russian society which, so far as possible, shall be free from the prejudice and passion generally aroused by this subject. My description

will be incomplete; there will be little mention, for example, of the lives of workers and collective farmers, but it will be sincere. I trust that the reader who has followed me so far no longer harbours any doubts regarding my sincerity or independence of mind.



**PART II**  
**MY BELOVED COUNTRY**



## RUSSIAN YOUTH

It has often been asserted that Russian youth is the principal beneficiary of the Revolution. That is true and the reason is not far to seek. A country deficient in qualified technicians looks to its youth, offers it the great advantages of training and education and gives it an incentive to better itself by serving the State. The previous generation derived greater benefit than we did from this early lack of technicians; during the first Five-year Plan two, and later three, years of study were sufficient to qualify as an engineer. This was the period of the *Rabfacs* (workers' universities) which enabled the cleverer of the factory hands to pursue higher studies while still remaining at the factory. These workers' universities were abolished before the 1941 war. And nowadays the better conditions available to students attract so large an influx of youths and girls that the State is able to require of them that application and hard work necessary to produce technicians and savants worthy of the name. Gradually the course of studies has been lengthened, increasing from three to five years for most of the higher technical schools and to seven years for the medical course.

The Russian student enjoys genuine freedom from all material cares. The grant that he receives is equal to the wages of a good worker. If he comes from the provinces he is accommodated in one of the students' hostels or collective lodgings. He takes his meals at the University canteen. He has but one anxiety: not to miss his lectures and to pass his examinations.

He leads a life not unlike a worker's, with similar worries, periods of leisure and prohibitions. He does not discuss politics, and he has no more leisure, for all lectures are

obligatory and his presence is noted on each occasion. He has neither more nor less money, and the periodical recurrence of the twice-yearly examinations, the final competitive examinations and frequent tests preclude his taking time off, inventing sartorial idiosyncracies or even wondering whether he is happy.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A RUSSIAN STUDENT

I LIVED with my parents. I was more fortunate than my sister, who had to be at work at seven o'clock; my first lecture was at a quarter to nine. But I was always late by the one and only alarm-clock in the family and got up just in time to shave, climb into my clothes, rush to the corner of the street and fight my way on to the packed trolley-bus which took me to the University. The crowded conditions and lack of discipline which prevail in the Moscow trams and buses must be seen to be believed. In the morning the workers all share what is the principal fear of every citizen in the U.S.S.R.—the fear of being late. As I have already mentioned, three slight infractions of this rule during a month involve prison; to be more than twenty minutes late is equivalent to being absent. In the large towns with a poor service, where each tram takes with it a cluster of human beings hanging on to the step, it is obvious that it is by no means impossible to be twenty minutes late. This obsession has become so much part of our life that to be twenty minutes late, that is, so late that it has dire consequences for the person in question, has come to be known as the "twenty-one game." "He's been playing the twenty-one game" means "he's done for."

With all the other, then, I queue up at the trolley-bus

stop with every intention of "jumping" a place on the step or at the rear on the little ladder leading to the top. This rough-and-tumble storming of the trolley-bus, despite the angry shouts from the resigned conductress, is a sport; students make it a point of honour to jump the queue, using force to push past women (I've seen factory women in tears of anger at being unable to force their way through the crowd, panic-stricken as it grows later and later and yet too weak to push their way on).

Once on the bus a sharp look-out must be kept not to lose anything. With us everyone steals anything and with marvellous dexterity. It is a gift no longer the preserve of professionals—amateurs abound. Ration cards (when they existed), wrist watches (especially sought after), purses, handkerchiefs and anything else. Nothing is ever left about. In the shops there are guard rails in front of the counters to discourage light fingers. My fellow students living at the university hostel took back to their room every morning the little stoves on which they made their tea.

## UNIVERSITY ORGANIZATION

At the University the time of arrival is noted and lectures begin. Six hours are spent at them with half an hour's break for the midday meal. The various departments are scattered all over the city according to the availability of premises. Each faculty is under the jurisdiction of a different ministry; only the University, properly so-called, that is the Arts and Science faculties, are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Medicine is under the Health Ministry. The numerous higher schools of Mines, Electricity and Mineral Oils belong to the Ministry of Specialized Production. Each of these schools or institutes possesses its own collective



hostel. There are about ten of them in Moscow. Some of them are huge, like that in the Leningrad Avenue, which comprises seven new buildings each with six or seven floors; others are quartered in former palaces or ministries. Enrolment in a faculty carries with it the obligation of endeavouring to find a free place in the corresponding hostel, and this question of accommodation is often a determining factor for those who are uncertain what course to take. Some hostels are crowded out, others have vacant beds. The freshman who is still hesitating what to take up is guided towards those departments that are less sought after. Thus the School of Woods and Forests does not attract sufficient numbers and the ministry on which it depends has increased the amount of the grants and made available to future students the spacious quarters and excellent food of the university hostels.

Directly they have passed the entrance examination it only remains for students to begin work, to be present at the compulsory political meetings and to sign the various manifestoes or protests against imperialist scheming. In other words they have only to take life easily. Indeed the authorities regard them as the *enfants terribles*, the spoilt children of the State, noisy, gay and undisciplined. And so, in unimportant matters, they are. The sight of a university canteen at midday with its jostling, pushing, disorderly and noisy crowd would probably scare our Western comrades. On the other hand there is never any question of missing a lecture even to meet the love of one's life. Studies come before everything else, that is, the diploma does, for it leads to a career, to a position, and membership of the new aristocracy. A Russian student is very much in earnest and extremely conventional, just like his elders and his juniors. When he dreams it is of a well-regulated future where he has his own place. Or else he keeps his dreams to himself.

## A SAFE FUTURE

WITH us, to the pride of forming the *élite* of the future is added the certainty of obtaining without scheming or influence a position in accordance with our training. We know nothing of the discouragement experienced for instance by a young Frenchman who before even obtaining his diploma is beginning to wonder what use he will make of it and is already resigned to wasting his life in earning his living and to going to swell the crowd of office employees with no special qualifications. The Russian student is already an official; the competitive University entrance examination is the first stage of a straightforward career in which his worth will be recognized and to which all his gifts will be devoted. If he has a vocation he will be fortunate for he can exercise it; if he merely longs for security he will be satisfied. This certainty probably helps to explain the absence of intellectual vagaries in so far as it makes anxiety, discontent and revolt impossible.

## MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL FOOD

AT the canteen I rejoin my friends. We take a table by storm—there are always too few for our needs—and in the general uproar order our meal. The menu provides a choice: when we are well off we allow ourselves meat, but usually our meal consists of soup, potatoes and vegetables together with a great quantity of bread. During the war a student's bread ration was equal to a heavy worker's—about a pound and three quarters a day, and it often happened that we devoured two days' ration in one day.

During meals newspapers are ~~harrowed~~—they are scarce

and always eagerly sought after—and pass from hand to hand until by evening they are merely illegible scraps of waste paper. Then there is the radio to be listened to and note taken of meetings which must be attended that evening. Frequently the subject of the meeting is not even announced. There is no need to do so, for whatever it is everyone will certainly be there.

## WORLDLY WISDOM IN THE SOVIET UNION

LIKE every factory and office each University department has its own party committee whose secretary keeps an eye on the activities of each of his fellows, verifies their attendance at meetings and sends in reports. Among students, as elsewhere, the proportion of Party members to the others is low, in spite of intense propaganda and the very definite advantages that membership of the Party offers. It is difficult to say whether this is due to mere inertia, distrust or the certainty that once enrolled among the *élite* the slightest false step will be fatal.

At the University, as elsewhere, we are all exhorted to join; many have belonged since their schooldays to the *Komsomol* (Communist Youth). But that is only the first stage in a long series. On reaching manhood comes the real choice whether to form one of six million or so Communists who are always to the forefront of public life with its honours and sudden disgrace, or whether to choose rather the far more uneventful and obscure life of those without Party membership. Some join the Party out of sincere enthusiasm or out of opportunism. The great mass of people remain in obscurity. Everyone knows that the surest way of avoiding trouble is to stand aside from the triumphs of the Party and its conflicts. Whatever the decision it is a personal one; everyone knows the

advantages and disadvantages, and all explanations are extremely dangerous.

A good deal might be said on the subject of worldly wisdom in Russia. It is composed of an extraordinary mixture of reasoned passivity, the instinct of self-preservation, adroitness in difficult circumstances and, principally, silence at the right moment.

Worldly wisdom means knowing how to hold on to life; it means not to stand out, not to criticize, not to put oneself forward, but to seek escape in the safe outlets of sport, literature, love or gaiety. The good citizen is harmless and efficient. The good citizen lives long.

## NO DILEMMAS

I COULD not understand the excitement caused in Paris during the Prague trials by the fact of a son demanding the death of his father who had been convicted of treachery and spying. We do not, of course, spend our time denouncing our relations. In fact, the question may never arise for millions of families, until the day when such an action appears to be clearly and unequivocally necessary. In that case there will be no hesitation. With us there is, practically speaking, no such thing as a dilemma. If the actions of one of our relations does not conform to the Soviet pattern of behaviour it is far better to denounce him and thus save the rest of the family than to wait for it to be done by one of the neighbours who lives only five yards away, by his factory mates or by a young brother busy on propaganda for the Communist Youth movement. On a last analysis it is better to limit the danger by prompt action. What I mean is, and it is this which is difficult to understand in the West, that such a decision is taken sanely, with regret but without fuss. With us it is no matter of high tragedy. To live means to conform;

those who do not conform must be delivered up to the guardianship of authority; they run less risk in prison or in a labour camp than in persevering in their error. In the same way a middle-class family in the West sees to it that one of its members who goes mad is locked up in an asylum, and on such occasions it is said that it is better so for everyone.

The great strength of the Soviet system is the preservation of its citizens from moral dilemmas. Morality and self-interest are always identical. The man who is punished was wrong, and we do not even wonder, in the long run, whether he was absolutely wrong or merely in relation to the accepted code of Soviet behaviour. Moreover, the punishment does not appear to us as very dreadful, for of prison or the labour camp we generally know very little save that they exist and are possible sides of life just like illness, failure at work or, in a word, worries of any sort. The veil of silence drawn over any opposition and the sanctions applied to it ensure that no one is quite certain what is at stake, and, contrary to general belief, what is never mentioned is far less terrible, since it remains vague, than the misfortunes about which speculation is voiced aloud and whose infinite possibilities are canvassed in relation to similar circumstances.

Everything is far simpler and life is peaceful even if for some it appears fraught with trouble.

## A GIGANTIC PLAN—INTELLECTUALIZATION

WHEN lectures are over there is a general exodus to the departmental library. It is quite usual to remain there until closing time, that is until 11.30 p.m., for most students do not buy the necessary books and manuals for their studies and examinations. \*

Studies are supervised to a far greater extent than in the West. In addition to the competitive entrance and passing-out examinations most professors set tests and written private work and require frequent revision to be done. There is an immense task, for in the short space of a few years they are obliged to give teaching of the highest standard to young students from all over the Soviet Union who have received their previous education in secondary schools of varying efficiency and who come from very different circumstances and countries and often speak another language. Frequently they are ill-prepared for the intellectual discipline of University life and are out of their element in the capital, finding their freedom a temptation to idleness.

When nowadays in the Latin Quarter I observe young students, often the sons of intellectuals or, in any case of middle-class families, brought up in a tradition of intellectual effort, who seek escape from their lectures on café terraces or at the cinema, it gives me some idea of the immensity of the Russian scheme to bring knowledge to whole generations of the children of the illiterate. If I am proud of one thing it is of our youth with its eagerness, simplicity, its moral values and enthusiasm as it undergoes its difficult apprenticeship to culture.

## STUDY—THE RUSSIAN OPEN SESAME

THE great majority of us work with an eagerness that is unknown among students in the West. With less ability, and lacking especially proper preparation for study, Russian students, in spite of obstacles of a hereditary or historical nature, take knowledge by storm, just as their fathers did with famine, industrialization and enemy invasion.

All universities provide complete evening courses for workers, at the end of which the worker-student can obtain the same State diploma as the full-time student. The only difference is that he receives no grant, as his salary enables him to live, and that his entrance to the course is governed by no age limit. Often he is married and the father of a family; he thus leads the double life of worker and student, sleeping little, always pressed for time and spending his nights at his books.

For nowadays study is the key to everything in Russia. With the exception of personal relationships and the influence of the Party, which affects but a small minority, the only means at the disposal of the ordinary citizen to obtain a more responsible position, greater opportunities of service and recognition, is to acquire knowledge—knowledge and technical ability are closely related. Full credit must be given to the State which, with the war at its height and in spite of general shortages and the requirements of industrial reconstruction and expansion, never shrank from the heavy responsibility and colossal expense of education and accommodation occasioned by the ever-increasing numbers needing to be educated, lodged, maintained and paid.

## MAKESHIFT ACCOMMODATION

IN 1946, when thousands of the homeless were still wandering about the streets of Moscow or adding to the overcrowding of their friends' rooms, all students were housed. It is true that many of us were perforce content with a bed in a dormitory containing ten, but that was better than a folding bed in a room shared by a whole family. And many students were lodged, four or five at a time, in rooms

intended for two or three. Even in the great hostel put up by Le Corbusier—that enormous glass house which provokes the jokes of the people of Moscow and the criticisms of the students who freeze in it despite the central heating—the little rooms meant for one, and measuring perhaps nine feet by six, were made to hold two: two narrow beds against the walls with a work table slipped in between. Immensely long corridors are bounded by glass walls; many minutes are required to traverse them and the students, always late, habitually go without their morning tea, prepared in the communal kitchen at the end of the corridors. Everyone is always running. Hurried steps continually echo in the corridors. It is a question of arriving in time for a lecture, of taking one's place at the canteen, of not missing a political meeting, of rushing to a discussion group, of going to swell the queue in front of the theatre in the uncertain hope of obtaining a seat after waiting through the whole night. It all forms a wonderful preparation for the future; our student days teach us the indispensable qualities required by our State—punctuality, patience, endurance, vitality.

Married students set an almost insoluble problem, unless they live with their relations and move their double bed into one or the other of the family "residences." For those who are lodged by the State there are very few double rooms available. I remember the sensation caused by two young couples among my friends who obtained from the manager of our hostel a judgment worthy of Solomon. Fortunately students' rooms each housed four—women on one side, men on the other. It was only necessary to put the two couples in the same room and place the original occupants in another. The two "households" thus lived together until the end of their course, to the delight of their fellow students, who teased them by inquiring if at night they ever mistook their partners.



## JAZZ AND INTROSPECTION

ALTHOUGH studies are engrossing and all lectures are compulsory—and at the top of the list those on Marxism, Leninism and dialectical materialism without which no one can obtain a qualification as a dentist, veterinary surgeon or building engineer—we keep one or two evenings a week for our friends or our pleasures. In the first place there is dancing, either in the students' hostels or at home—by dint of moving out into the corridor the furniture of the one room that comprises the family dwelling and all crowding somehow or other on to the confined floor-space. When there is music there is dancing. Then there are impromptu parties in friends' flats or in the common room where, sitting round the table, we sing, either together or by turns, the endless folk songs and the more modern, romantic compositions which, whether gay or sentimental, always mention the homeland, the Party or our socialist future.

*I'll love you always,  
And I want you to love me,  
Just as you love your country.*

So, for instance, runs one of our popular songs.

In spite of the relative austerity of our lives we are exceedingly fond of having fellow students to supper. Each brings what he can—a bottle of wine, vodka, a dozen little cakes. There are endless discussions of the latest best-seller, or the acting in the latest play. With greatest interest we follow the literary news of the day—there is little merit in this, for intellectual production is as slow as industrial production is rapid. If one of the well-known Government novelists is at work on a book the newspapers herald its arrival upwards of a year in advance, the masterpiece is

eagerly awaited, friends lend it to each other and its contents form the matter of endless discussion which here again is influenced by the current "party line." There is no question of condemning a work out of hand, of course—indeed we are an easy public—but of pondering over the characters, their actions, their dispositions, and so on. We play at imagining ourselves in their place, wondering whether it would be better to be like Petia or Vania, whether we should fall in love with Sonia or Macha. Our novelists always depict life as we know it and we are excited about the fate of their characters because it might well be ours. In short, as our friends at the Sorbonne would say, a trifle condescendingly, "the approach is psychological."

That is hardly astonishing. We have few books, films or external temptations. Our great distraction is ourselves, and that, at our age, means love.

## DIPLOMA HUNTING—HUSBAND HUNTING

LOVE in the U.S.S.R. is a serious matter: a couple meet, they take to each other, see each other regularly, at University lectures, at the theatre, in the evenings in the park, or at a dance. They go on meeting; they decide to marry. Marriage is postponed until the end of the University course. For the male students studies come before love and form the pattern of their lives as, later on, their profession will. The female students are less diploma-minded; as elsewhere, they sometimes forget their career for Peter or for Paul, for marriage and children. They crowd into the technical schools which train engineers, because the engineer is the hero of Soviet society. When they have a promise of marriage they often give up their uncongenial studies. The great number of girls in the electrical or mining institutes is a recognized joke with us, for it is realized that many of

them, once they have "hooked" the husband of their choice, will give up all idea of a career. Young women dream of engineers just as in the West they do of a young man of good social position.

Once the ideal woman has been found, *the* woman, in short, whose tender glance or tip-tilted nose has cast the fatal spell, plans are made for the future. It is all quite simple and no obstacles occasioned by class or prejudice will stand in the young lovers' way. The student, who is the son of an agricultural labourer, is as good as the student whose father is a high official or man of learning. The individual is judged according to the present generation, that is, with regard to the future. In our new social conditions conflicts are sometimes occasioned but on different grounds; a novel that was much discussed a few years ago depicted the love of a woman engineer for a collective farmer, a mere peasant. Ought she to marry him in spite of the difference in their interests and training? Could she hope that one day she would raise him up to her own level? Or should she look among her equals for her partner for life? We were much excited by the problem and there was a considerable diversity of opinion.

## PURITANS AND "PIGEONS"

THE quality that we esteem higher than all others is moral integrity, purity. That may astonish my friends in the West to whom I have just mentioned the petty thieving that goes on daily, the official lies and the continual denunciations. Yet it is true that the form of society in which we are trained is a profoundly moral one which emphasizes human values and decency in private life. Neither our literature nor our Press aims at being sensational in the Western sense of the word; morality is never the subject of curiosity or artistic

expression; our newspapers never mention the private life of our statesmen or actors.

One of my fellow-students was the daughter of an actor at the Moscow Grand Theatre. I was very fond of going to her home because everything connected with the theatre fascinates Russian youth. I admired the extreme comfort of their modern flat, the new piano and the two rooms where the family had ample space at their disposal. My friend had a small room to herself! But her parents, brilliant and celebrities though they were, led a quiet hard-working life, devoted to their art and their family—with them there was neither luxury nor neurosis.

The post-war years have witnessed the appearance of what we call in Russian "pigeons." They are the frivolous young men, lovers of jazz and affected clothes.

Fast young women are treated with a mixture of fond contempt and irony. No mention is made of their personality or their temperament in order to excuse them. They are said to be "weak in the nether parts" and men look elsewhere for a partner for life.

Card games are absolutely forbidden, and playing cards are not on sale; those who play in secret run the risk of being sent down from the University or a prison sentence.

Crimes caused by jealousy seem inconceivable and if one occurs it is not mentioned by the Press. Marriage and divorce are very quick. Romance offers a solution both to the workers' material problems (for two salaries are better than one) and to the sentimental needs of Russian manhood encompassed by the rigidity of the social system. Private life is our compensation, our refuge, and the especial expression of our personality.

If, while awaiting the completion of their studies and official marriage, couples start living together (without, obviously, regular accommodation) a blind eye is turned to it because it is realized that when the time comes they will

"regularize" their position. Fidelity is the rule and those who desire to separate, or indeed have the opportunity, are exceedingly rare. The pressure of work and ambition, coupled with the entirely conscious puritanism of the Russian attitude, have created this rigorous outlook in combination with an authentic personal feeling and normal tastes. At the age of twenty, in spite of the crude and frequently coarse language which is the rule among students, I had never heard pederasty mentioned and the revelations for which I was indebted to my companions in the Santé prison (in Paris) filled me with violent disgust—to the great amusement of the said companions.

The sense of values acquired at school and developed by Communist life are so deeply rooted in me that the expression "bourgeois decadence," in spite of all that I have learnt to love and admire in the West, still retains its meaning for me. It is enough, I find, to go by Saint-Germain-des-Près and see the experienced-looking youngsters of fifteen or sixteen to recover for a time the longing for the youth of my own country and its simple needs.

## THE FAMILY IN SOVIET RUSSIA

AFTER the experiments and sudden lack of restraint resulting from the Revolution and civil war, the Russian family has regained a certain structural stability which makes it not unlike the middle-class family in the West. The quick and easy marriage and divorce of the twenties, the deference shown to irregular unions, have not survived the exacting requirements of a hard life nor the atmosphere of strict morality surrounding education and its inherent principles.

The policy of repopulation has produced with us the same results as elsewhere. In order to increase the number of young citizens the State has exalted motherhood, a by-no-

means difficult undertaking in a country where large families have always been the rule. The prohibition of contraceptives and, simply, the entire absence of all instruction in such matters among the younger generation, leaves women to the capriciousness of nature and their own formidable fruitfulness.

The Russian woman is sustained by the thought that she alone has the advantage of social services. Anyone who asserted that social security exists in capitalist countries would be called a fool. It is fortunate, in fact, that she is thus uninformed, for, as is well known, Soviet legislation is extremely niggardly. The system of family allowances does not exist. It is only after the fifth child that the mother receives a bonus, and then it is very small. At her eighth child she receives a medal and at her eleventh the title of "Hero of Motherhood"; but the bonuses allotted to these heroes are very low in comparison with the help given by capitalist governments to mothers of two children.

The only women who really benefit under Soviet legislation are unmarried mothers and the divorced. At first, as has been mentioned, the tendency was to give every facility to irregular unions and to make divorce almost automatic. Men took advantage of this to leave their wives and children and disappear without paying the maintenance for which they were responsible, and the State was obliged to provide for these fatherless children. Nowadays it pays quite adequate allowances to the unmarried mother. On the other hand divorce procedure is becoming increasingly long and costly and this acts as a deterrent to couples at variance.

Although propaganda and literature have together made woman aware that she is man's equal and not his chattel, material equality, owing to the work that she performs, is normal and has given her a very real independence in comparison with women in the West. If her husband no longer loves her, or if she loves another, her future is not so

heavily burdened with the fear of poverty as in many capitalist societies. Work she will always find even if she has given up all professional activity during the years of child-bearing. On the other hand the crowded conditions in which most Russian families live render adultery simple and easy. It occurs without fuss, if not always without tragedy. It would be foolish to generalize in a matter that is obviously pre-eminently individual, but it can be asserted that the husband often accepts his misfortune with a certain indulgence: woman is his equal, he, too, has learnt this. They separate; that is all.

Although youthful love has been idealized by literature that frequently paints it in rosy colours, adulterous love is not held in honour by novels and films. Thus it has lost in dramatic force and psychological interest what it has gained in facility.

The almost total absence of prostitution frequently causes youths to turn to older women, respectable working women or mothers of families, for their sexual education. The husband works at the other end of the town, often at night (for regular night-shifts have been restarted in almost all undertakings); he never comes home to the midday meal, so that there is nothing to prevent these momentary lapses, without complications, which frequently form the only distraction of these hard-working creatures.

## WILLING VICTIMS

THE emancipation of women was in the forefront of the young revolutionaries' programme. Like many other ambitions it was submerged by the weight of the pressing problems to be solved by the youthful State, but it would be absurd to deny that woman in Russia has to a large extent won recognition, dignity, equal pay and an individuality

equal to a man's. The last fifty years have certainly witnessed this emancipation of women throughout the world; still it must be remembered, as at every page of this narrative, that in Russia we started from a very low level and each step upwards has been achieved by dint of hard struggle with the centuries-old habits of those whom it was frequently a matter of setting free in spite of themselves.

At every change of the party line it became necessary to impose a fresh outlook on minds attuned to the former policy. And always it had to be done quickly. For those in authority have not the time to wait for the results of their decisions to mature. As in all new countries the necessary adjustments only appear clearly in the light of failure, when it is already too late or almost so. It is decided, for example, to promulgate a law against abortion after having allowed the practice and even encouraged it for well nigh twenty years. It is decreed that the need for such a measure is to be greeted with enthusiasm at meetings of factory women, departmental committees and gatherings held simultaneously all over the country. The simplest method, possibly the crudest, on a last analysis becomes the only valid one.

But it should not be thought that Russians are not alive to the irony of these "spontaneous" reversals of policy. They merely know that they must join in this show of enthusiasm and women, who call for severe penalties against the unrestricted use of practices formerly praised to the skies, are also well aware that by refusing to join their voices to the chorus they have nothing to gain and everything to lose.

In the same way—and for the obvious reason of accelerating production—at the end of the war women "demanded" that maternity leave should be shortened by one month; there was the same insistent enthusiasm on the part of the victims and the same discreet, extremely discreet, smiles on



the part of their partners. As a consequence of these mass demonstrations it was enacted that two weeks before lying-in and two weeks afterwards should be deducted from the paid leave granted for childbirth.

At the mercy of laws which on the one hand tend to protect her and on the other to restrain her freedom woman, like man, in every detail of existence is dependent on the needs of production and defence. But her lot, by comparison with her mother's or her grandmother's, gives her good grounds for self-congratulation. She imagines that nurseries for workers' children put at her disposal by every factory, medical services at school or work, and paid leave for childbirth, are to be found only in Soviet Russia. The picture that is set before her of her Western sisters, as slaves to masculine immorality or to drudgery, helps her to put up with a hard and often exhausting life. She is helped, too, by the very real progress in the organization of work, the increasing effects of the huge reconstruction plan and, above all, by the hope of suitable living-quarters. In the results of peace-time production and in the hope engendered by statistics she finds the strength to bear constant over-work, little difficulties and great disasters, twenty times a day and without even realizing it, to perform miracles of endurance in order to provide clothes, cleanliness and warmth for her family and to manage her household.

## SPACE IS RELATIVE

AMONG those who gave me a roof in Paris were a young couple who lived with their parents. In spite of their cramped quarters they contrived a fairly wide space to put up a bed for me. It was difficult to make these young people understand that their accommodation—in their eyes a lamentable and temporary expedient—to a couple with

children in Moscow would have been the flat of their dreams.

Immediately after the Revolution there was considerable talk of the "socialization" of the Russian family. It was an abstract idea which never took shape, save in so far as it became a reality due to the necessities of "collective" life—a life in confined quarters, it must be admitted, in former bourgeois houses with huge flats of eight or ten rooms into each of which were crowded—always as a temporary measure—from five to nine families.

I say nothing of the homeless who in the post-war years could be counted by tens of thousands in the great cities, regular tramps who slept anywhere while waiting for better days. Those who "squatted" in the congested cellars of the large houses were in a better position; they lived there, produced children, and brought them up in these unlighted holes . . . while waiting for better days.

Every square foot of available space is utilized. When I hear French people talking of the housing crisis I am obliged to smile. According to Russian standards, without further building Paris could easily contain four or five times its present population.

The former bathrooms of imperial times are no longer, in our days, the attribute of wealth. In the hands of the people they have quickly been put to a more essential use than that of cleanliness. The bath has been replaced by a double bed and the children huddle together in the corner—while waiting for better days, of course.

## PRIVACY: A FORBIDDEN LUXURY

It is a fact, or at least it is supposed to be, that had it not been for the war the terrible housing problem would by now be well on the way to a solution. For want of more

tangible consolation people have to be content with that. But it was the same before the war.

The nightmare of families living in close proximity governs the whole Soviet way of life, is the constant inspiration of the theatre and shapes both language and humour. But principally it deforms daily life, is at the root of numberless problems and, perhaps, solves many others.

There is no need to go right into the dwelling of an ordinary Russian citizen—the sight of the endless list of tenants on the door on a staircase of one of the old houses in the centre of the city is quite enough. Each name is followed by the number of rings required to summon its owner; Petrov: one long, two short; Sidorov: two long, one short; etc. The visitor rings. Everyone stops what they are doing to count the rings. It is the only time when there is complete silence. On the staircase, in the corridor, you stumble over heaps of coal, piles of wood, sacks of stores, bottles to be returned, all the thousand and one things for which there is no space in the single room allotted to the couple, or to the family of four, five or even seven persons. "Living space" is incredibly elastic. And so is human endurance. There is no ground for astonishment, therefore, that the threat of the concentration camp or prison does not with us bear quite the same tragic character as it can do in the West. Between two militiamen (as we call policemen in Russia) a man is taken away, leaving behind his work, his family and his position as a good citizen, but not that inner freedom which is built on solitude, moral comfort and privacy.

I have frequently been asked in France if in Russia man grows accustomed to this absence of being alone. What answer can I give? I should say that always he suffers from it, but that in his suffering he is aware only of the most obvious manifestations of overcrowding—the quarrels of the Ivanov family which keep him awake at night and

whose ups and downs he can hear perfectly through the thin partition between the rooms; the latest arrival in the Petrov family is teething—it will be an uncomfortable night for the twenty-three occupants of the premises.

If an elder brother brings back a friend from the country his young brother will spend the night in the parents' bed and the father will sleep badly, and so there are quarrels. The Smirnov family have lost a bottle: without a bottle wine or milk is unobtainable; they conduct an inquiry among their neighbours which may well go on for days and days—more quarrels. The Popov's heap of coal has diminished. Who is guilty? For weeks Mrs. Popov carries her suspicions and veiled hints to the Ivanov and the Sidorov families—again, quarrels. There is only one kitchen; who is to use it first in the evening and who in the morning? Endless quarrels, shouting and retaliation. How many women crowd shoulder to shoulder into the diminutive kitchen without gas (gas is a luxury which, a few years ago, was enjoyed by only about five per cent of the population, those, that is, living in the newest houses) cluttered up with all kinds of little stoves, spirit lamps, paraffin stoves (the famous "Prilus," for example, whose flickering flame has already smoked out generations of Russians). There are quarrels to get at the only tap or for a turn at the pump in the yard; there are quarrels to use the only bath—if there is one—or the only lavatory—if it exists. Quarrels again about the share to be paid of the electricity bill for the whole house, about looking after an infirm old man, the last survivor of an extinct family who lingers on and who must be cared for. Quarrels, and sometimes brawls, between the claimants for a room left empty by death.

Pettiness, bitterness, tragedy; amidst all this excitement engendered by constantly repeated small incidents the mother brings into the world and raises numerous children, the father returns from exhausting work and gets ready for his

evening classes, the child learns to love his country and to be proud of the society which is training him, the student works hard for his diploma, the daughter imagines herself leading a life under similar circumstances with the man of her dreams.

Things must be seen as they are: these lives under constraint, people stifling in a space of two or three square yards, lead to enervation. The result is a constant state of "nerves," of exasperation in dealing with relations or neighbours, but no one would dream of considering it unhealthy. The moral health of these people is such that they live under pressure up to the day of their death and that the proportion of insane persons is relatively far less than elsewhere. But voices are shrill, gestures abrupt, breakages frequent, just as the standards of behaviour are far lower in Russia than in the West. A couple would not consider themselves on the brink of divorce because blows and insults are frequent. A woman overburdened with children who works all day at a factory and comes home in the evening to an untidy room to get the supper ready in the cold and the general atmosphere of restlessness would not think of complaining of her nerves. She would find cause for considerable amusement if you told her of her contemporaries in the U.S.A. who are treated for a "nervous breakdown" because they have too much time or money or temperament.

These accumulated tensions occasionally give rise to violence, but generally they are aired before the local magistrate, who is the most overworked official in the whole of the Soviet Union. Not a day goes by without dozens of cases coming before him; quarrels between neighbours, complaints by one family of another, of all kinds from the grotesque to the tragic, the files of which would present a fearful picture, and frequently an unjust one, of daily life in Russia.

## FROM PRODUCER TO CONSUMER

THE material difficulties of life cause as much, and sometimes more, suffering to Russian families as the difficulties of human relations—in addition, to quarrels there are problems.

There is the problem of being on time for work after doing the household shopping first thing in the morning, for the shops are open very early, and taking the children to school. In the evening there is the problem of pushing a way through the mass of humanity in the Underground stations to avoid losing an hour or two pinned in by the crowd before finally emerging to push one's way on to a train. This Underground railway, with its stations in multi-coloured marble, the pride of the whole Soviet Union, is the scene at rush hour of incredible congestion; thousands of people, packed in the passages and stairways are forced to remain motionless and crushed together as one train after another leaves without them.

There is the problem of heating, of buying clothes, of obtaining a certificate or a permit for the smallest matter. There is the problem of rest and the problem of work.

Whose fault is it? Is it due to the great scarcity of consumer goods, still persisting in spite of post-war improvements, to the absence of organization or to the absence of competition in a system of distribution under State control where nothing is done for the benefit of the customer? Scarcity complicates everything. With a salary which he does not always manage to spend the worker accomplishes the same feats as his neighbour in order to obtain the necessities of life.

The shops in the large towns, often the last word in luxury, are crowded together at the centre. The local grocer

on the corner is unknown, and there can be no question of forgetting to buy one's bread on the way home from work. There are crowds and queues everywhere, even for the goods that are plentiful. The number of salesmen is always insufficient, so that they are outnumbered by the customers. You queue up, for example, at the baker's. For hygienic reasons, which would raise a smile in the West, the salesman who serves the bread must not dirty his hands with money; having received your loaf you must queue up again to pay for it. It is not the goods that are wanting but the manpower.

Supposing that after months of saving the decision is taken to buy some article of furniture that the increasing size of the family renders indispensable. The undertaking forms an unusual adventure that will be talked of in the family for some time to come.

Where, in this particular month and year, are there beds for sale? One of the large shops still has some. Your friend So-and-So's cousin's sister has been there and saw them. You rush to the shop. Frequently it turns out that the news was false. "We're expecting them to come in," says the salesman, as in all countries of the world, but with us you have to wait a long time. But, supposing that it is true that beds are available and at a possible price and, finally, you are the possessor of one, the problem is not yet solved for all that. This bed must be taken home. Why should the State stores lose all their profit by paying for vans and petrol? Customers storm in and carry off everything that they have for sale.

What then does the customer do? He brings his influence, his cunning or his muscular strength into play—according to the length of his purse. With a certain amount of influence from a friendly factory manager or foreman he may be able to borrow a lorry during a slack hour; if he is cunning he will hire the horse and cart from a peasant who comes into town for the market; if he is extravagant he will hire a taxi

or a four-wheeler cab. In the last resort he will fall back on the muscles of his four arms—for those of his wife or fiancée will be available—and will carry back through the town the bed, sideboard or table that he has purchased. He will take his time and stop for breath as often as necessary; one does not buy furniture every day, thank God!

The same problem arises in buying coal, an absolutely indispensable commodity in a country where temperatures fall to forty degrees below freezing point. On arrival in France the street coal merchants struck me as one of the most wonderful manifestations of civilization. Even in Moscow it is worse; of course in the provinces central heating is only to be found in new houses (and I should add that, having known it at home, the heat provided by it did not exceed on its best days forty-five to fifty degrees Fahrenheit). The sale of coal takes place at the depot that is beside the principal stations connecting the capital with the Don and Ural coalfields. The trucks are unloaded direct on to the ground; in front of these black pyramids stand every day long lines of customers armed with sacks, boxes and baskets. The State sells the coal, it is the customer's responsibility to find a receptacle for it, and transportation, or else to drag the sacks home on foot. Here again the numerous difficulties are overcome in various ways: by borrowing a hand truck, a lorry, a bicycle with a trailer. Once the precious commodity is at the house some place for it has still to be found. In the crowded houses, with people living in the cellars, the precious stuff is emptied out in the passages, the yard, on the staircase, or even in the living-room.

The list of these problems, both great and small, could be continued endlessly. Complications: there you have the key word to daily life in Soviet Russia. The complications of a government service in which no one dares to assume responsibility; complications arising from all sorts of causes,



from the lack of wrapping paper to the scarcity of telephones, overworked doctors or non-existent railway timetables. In the country of collectivization the citizen knows that he must rely on himself alone.

## COMPLICATIONS AND CONTRASTS

At the hairdresser's nothing but a sterile brush that the barber takes from its tinfoil packing will be used to soap your face. In a food shop the salesman will hand you without the slightest hesitation a piece of meat entirely unwrapped—there is no paper, you must manage as best you can. In this connection the story is told of a customer who, indignant at being given an unwrapped herring straight into his hands, called for the complaint book, to be found in all shops, tore out a few pages, and wrapped up his purchase.

## “HAVES” AND “HAVE-NOTS”

On the other hand nothing simplifies life like necessity. Thus the pressure of daily existence explains in part the passive attitude to general problems evinced by Russians, and the scarcity of everything that is not absolutely necessary precludes his racking his brains to obtain luxuries. In Russia there is nothing like the vanity displayed by the Western worker in connection with the smallest external sign of wealth, whether it be a question of smartness, deference to fashion, a certain style or taste for possessions. Of course, a Russian family longs for a wireless set, a holiday in the country, a bicycle, even a car. But everywhere, and for everything, you must put your name down or else track down the shop in some remote district which, for a day or two in every year, has the precious commodity in stock.

Directly a queue forms anywhere a Russian will rush to join it. "What's being sold to-day?" he will inquire.

At home, because my parents were in a privileged position, we had a piano, and also a telephone on account of my father's work. The telephone provided the children with an endless source of amusement. Since we were unable to call up our friends, less privileged than we, we telephoned to unknown victims chosen at random in the Directory, which, for a population greater than that of Paris, contained a list of subscribers certainly twenty times smaller. After the war, moreover, the Directory was no longer published, for the list of subscribers was classified as a "State secret."

There is little covetousness, therefore, because what is scarce is not money but goods. And there is little bitterness, also, since the generality of workmates, friends and relations share the same lot. To the Western "If you earned more . . ." corresponds the Russian "If there were more to be had." The difference is obvious.

As for the real privileged class of the system, whose existence is known to all and who drive about in large silent cars, the luxury and ease that they enjoy is so little realized that it arouses only a vague and distant respect. The innumerable advantages of the position of high official, superior officer, factory director, in a word of all those called "responsible workers," are both closely concentrated and concealed—their houses and summer villas are guarded, forming real aristocratic residential districts, they enjoy special shops and restaurants to which the general public are not admitted, reserved holiday resorts, etc.

## JUST LIKE THE CINEMA

JUST once in my life I happened to penetrate into one of these fabulous restaurants with my brother Michael, the

hero of the siege of Leningrad whom I have already mentioned. We were both dazzled by the luxury and the food—"just like the cinema" we remarked. This childish expression shows well that the sight of such luxury is denied to the man in the street. If anything seems wonderful, sumptuous or, as we say in Russia, "civilized" it is "just like the cinema" or "just like the West." The new luxury food shops, where you can buy sweets, chocolates and cakes, better than any that I have tasted in France, beautifully wrapped and displayed, are described as "just like the West." And the same is true of ice-cream parlours where all kinds of ices, fruit drinks and sweet things may be had.

On the other hand the cinema in Soviet Russia, even at its most realistic, by adding details which amuse some and pass unnoticed by others, tends to "westernize" Russian life: there will be depicted, for example, the young Russian doctor who, before getting into bed, puts on pyjamas, whereas pyjamas and night dresses, not to mention dressing-gowns, are entirely unknown among us.

## FASHION—AN UNKNOWN FORM OF SLAVERY

IN Russia a man sleeps in his pants, or naked. He generally possesses a uniform of some sort (workers, students, doctors, diplomats all wear a uniform, often provided free), and sometimes a suit for "going out." When the uniform is being cleaned he manages by borrowing from a friend, or else he wears some nondescript garment which will pass unnoticed.

I was much amused at the sight of the members of the Russian delegation to the Paris Congress of the International Union of Students; they all wore faultless lounge suits,

raincoats and soft felt hats. I never remember having seen a Moscow student in a raincoat and felt hat.

All visitors are struck by the drab appearance of everyone in Russia. The women and children share this indifference to clothes. The worker in France, and especially his wife make it a point of honour to dress their children well. The Russian mother, always overworked, is careful only to see that her children are well covered. One of my cousins, who married an engineer, possessed two coats. The family always mentioned the fact with a certain reverence.

## LEISURE

THE right to holidays, which in Russia is regarded as one of the triumphs of socialism, does not ensure a summer holiday for all workers. The yearly two weeks is taken when it falls due. Those with influence arrange to take it in the summer, then come the others, according to their work record. In all departments of life this mixture of influence and impartial reward is to be found. For those whose holiday comes in winter the problem is simple—they rest at home.

For the most fortunate there exists a restricted number of places in rest houses, some at a charge, others free, according to the position of the beneficiary. The country-lover registers at a travel bureau which will sell him, according to availability, a *poutievka* (route card), a kind of ticket giving him the right to a few weeks' stay with full board in one of the rest houses in the Caucasus, Crimea or elsewhere. Like everything in excess of what is absolutely necessary the demand is far greater than the supply. Even the lower-salaried workers could afford such holidays, but there are few places and only about one in twenty of the applications can be satisfied every year.

In these rest houses discipline is strict; punctuality is required for meals—which are copious and well cooked—and justice must be done to them under penalty of being sent home. A siesta must be taken after dinner and silence kept during it. In short, this period at the rest house, obtained with such difficulty, must be really beneficial to health. The worker who has earned the right to stay at a rest house can sometimes be accompanied by his wife, who will have to pay for her keep. But very often the husband goes to one place, the wife and children to another. More often still no one goes anywhere, and no one complains of overwork after years spent in the factory, in travelling on the Underground, queueing for provisions and living in the dust of the city.

On Sundays those who live in towns go out into the country. But to undertake this short journey a philosophical outlook is necessary. The suburban trains come and go as they can. In the morning the family sets out for the station. There they take up their position and wait for their train; they have plenty of time, the whole day for once. They let the crowded trains go by, and sometimes, with a little luck, they find one that will take them to see the green fields.

The Russian is a great walker. If, after work is over, he wants to see a friend who lives too far away to be invited for the evening meal, he arranges to meet him in the street or in a park. Since there are neither bars nor cafés to provide a few moments' relaxation between the hard discipline of the working day and the confusion and disorder of domestic life, people walk in the street. If the cold is unbearable—as it is even for Russians in the winter months—they will go into a shop to warm themselves for a moment; the salesman is accustomed to this and will not endeavour to make them buy something or leave.

The street is the general meeting-place, the scene of activity, strolling couples and parades. The inhabitants of

large towns have been taught to keep it clean and tidy. No one would dream of throwing away a cigarette end or a piece of paper on the pavement. On the other hand, in the entire absence of public lavatories the stroller has not the slightest hesitation in relieving himself under a doorway or in a corner between two walls, and his companion would calmly do the same. The smell to be encountered at the entrance to the houses on the busier streets can be imagined. Yet if anyone spits on the pavement he is at once the object of universal reprobation.

## CHILDHOOD

CHILDREN are not troubled, obviously, with the cares of daily life. First there is the day-nursery, for those whose mothers work, and then school where the pupils take their midday meal—which is cheap and plentiful—followed by the factory or higher studies; all this goes to make up a methodical but carefree life during which they grow accustomed to the normal shortages and obvious hardships. The child will enroll in the Young Communists, and dream of becoming a “work hero” or a soldier, a position enjoying immense prestige. He will read improving books and learn thus, almost by heart, the (revised and corrected) history of the great Revolution.

On his account his parents will make sacrifices whose extent he cannot realize. As long as he is small and needs rearing (in Russian *prokormit*, that is feeding until he is old enough to work) his mother will usually have to work and to deny herself the slightest luxury. She will hardly ever ask his help with the housework, for the studies of the young are sacred, especially in the eyes of those who did not themselves have this advantage. She is far less demonstrative than her counterpart in the West and will kiss her child rarely, scold

and correct unsparingly, but accepts with resignation, and often 'gladly, the sixth, the ninth, the twelfth child sent to her by nature.

Sometimes the child will have to go to work at the age of ten. The calling-up of children from their families and from school by the Ministry of Labour, during the war, was the greatest fear of mothers. In the town in the Urals where we were evacuated in 1943 I remember seeing groups of snotty-nosed boys go by, rigged out in dirty uniforms, who had been dragged from their parents and were already striking their first blows on the production front. The 1917 Revolution—as all remember—took place to the accompaniment of "Down with child labour." Far worse than the arbitrary decree of a government department is the fact that frequently too numerous a family, or a household in which the mother can no longer work, obliges the child to seek employment in a factory as at the worst period of early capitalism.

## THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE, HEROES OF DAILY LIFE

A SORDID life, I shall be told, holding no place for the enthusiasm, the moral principles and the generosity mentioned in a former paragraph.

Nevertheless, like everywhere else, contrasts and inconsistencies are closely connected. Were it not for the profound generosity, the real indifference to small misfortunes, the ready smile, and the underlying training that we owe to an education which teaches us to disdain comfort and to aim always at the common purpose, this life would be unbearable and complete anarchy or collective neurosis would have long ago destroyed the Russian people. Consider, for example, what a few years of unemployment and difficulties

did to the German people. Perhaps I shall be accused of bias if, with all the simplicity at my command, I assert that in such conditions to work and to desire to look to the future and be proud of the present proves conclusively both the resilience of a race and the value of the new education.

The Soviet State, which shows itself generous indeed with medals and all kinds of decorations, in its distribution of awards has forgotten Hero number one of the Revolution—the entire Russian people. An award of this nature would be both a condemnation of Government organization and profound homage to the spirit that it has engendered. For it is to the entire Russian people that the “Order of Daily Life” should go.

## THE ÉLITE

HERE are a few words about those Russians for whom the thousand-and-one problems of daily life do not exist, or hardly so, owing to the rank that they occupy, and the responsibilities that are their lot in the complex structure of our country. These important persons can be divided summarily into two divisions—those who are approachable and those who are not. We will begin with the latter.

## THE UNAPPROACHABLE ÉLITE

AMONG my childhood memories figures the friendly visit paid to my grandfather, the apiculturist, by the old Bolshevik, Ivan Petrovski, at that time the all-powerful secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party. “And this is our grandchild from Moscow,” remarked my grandfather. The great man kindly patted my head. Such an occurrence would be unthinkable nowadays or else the visit would be official, in full state and announced at length in the newspapers.



For those whom I call the unapproachable *élite*, the men who, 'in Moscow, live' in that row of ill-assorted palaces surrounded by a wall and known collectively as the Kremlin, are only seen by ordinary citizens at official ceremonies and from a distance; all that is known of them is what the newspapers are pleased to reveal. And that is very little. All my knowledge of Stalin, for example, I owed to the translation of a book by Henri Barbusse; from it I learned that he lived in a modest annexe to one of the palaces intended for servants and that he had two sons, Basil and James. When I reached France I discovered a hundred times more about our great men than I had ever heard in Russia. What are they like? Do they live in conditions of Asiatic luxury or of Spartan austerity? What are their tastes, their hobbies, their amusements? I know no more than my readers. To the ordinary citizen in U.S.S.R. the life led by these men of the Kremlin is as legendary as that of the inhabitants of another planet. How I envied foreigners, whether they were Communists or not, who were allowed to penetrate inside. I know that it was not always so and that in Lenin's lifetime my father went there on several occasions. In those days entrance was allowed if a document of identity could be produced. I used to get him to describe the palaces, their sumptuous fittings and the furniture dating back to the Czars. In particular I found it difficult to believe that he had encountered Lenin out for a stroll, just as if he had been the most ordinary of mortals.

## THE APPROACHABLE ÉLITE

I CALL the approachable *élite* all those persons of the first rank who, although they do not live in the Kremlin, occupy in our country leading positions, that is high officials in the ministries and State industries to whose number must

be added certain men of learning, authors and artists. My family was related, remotely it is true, to a personage of this class. One of my cousins had married the son of a high official in the Ministry of Agriculture (*glavk*). The young couple lived with the parents and I had occasion to call on them (but they never returned my visit). I was thus able to admire a flat of four or five rooms occupied by only four persons, with wireless, gramophone, carpets, bathroom, etc., in a huge new block of white buildings, an entirely private quarter with its own shops and its own school to which only the children of tenants of the block were admitted. They had asked me to come and discuss literature, for they knew that I wrote poetry. During the conversation the father-in-law, the *glavk*, came in and I was introduced to the great man. Bit by bit I told him the whole story of my experiences at Chagry, I described the shocking way the evacuated Ukrainians were treated by the peasants; he seemed intensely interested in my story.

"It will be a help to me, young man," he remarked, "if you will put all that in writing. Make out a detailed report for me and bring it to me at the Ministry. Do you mind?"

I was somewhat disconcerted and wondered if I should cause trouble to my friend Teliatin and the others. I came to the conclusion in the end that I was not dealing with the N.K.V.D. and that the *glavk's* business was evacuation and resettling. And I must admit that the idea of serving the State pleased and flattered me. I promised to draw up the required report.

A week later, having set down what I know in a way that, to my mind, brought out clearly the hardships of the evacuees without involving disagreeable consequences for the peasants, I set out for the Ministry armed with my passport, with us a necessary document for a visit to a government office. But I was unaware of the bureaucratic formalities that I should encounter on this occasion.

Having shown my passport to the usher in the waiting-room, situated in a small building standing on its own, a kind of guardroom, I was able to telephone to the *glavk* to apprise him of my arrival. He asked me to wait and set about putting in motion the machinery for a pass to be issued to me by the "Commandant" of the Ministry, a sort of departmental officer in charge of internal security. Half an hour later I was called by the usher, who handed me the precious document on which appeared not only my personal particulars and the reason for my visit, but the exact hour and minute of its delivery. I left the guardroom, crossed a small courtyard and at the entrance of the building housing the Ministry produced my pass and passport to the two heavily armed guards who carefully scrutinized the two documents and especially the time appearing on the pass. Finally I was ushered in to the *glavk* who, after glancing at my report and asking me about one or two details, thanked me and closed the interview. It had lasted two minutes. But leaving was once more quite a ceremony—the *glavk* had to sign the pass, his secretary to stamp it and note on it the exact time. Again it was carefully scrutinized by the guards as if they had never seen it before.

In this manner are our *élite* protected; nor are they alone in this, the same procedure is applied to all who work with them. Had I desired to visit the *glavk's* typist the same formalities would have been required. The careful noting of the time, to the exact minute, is to prevent an ill-disposed caller taking advantage of admission to the Ministry and entering an office where he has no right to be in order to purloin some confidential document or some of the statistical information which in Russia is a jealously guarded secret.

To return to the *élite*. The material advantages which they enjoy are very numerous. Not only flats but many other things that a mere mortal would never dream of.

At their service is a special chain of reserved shops where, although prices are the same as elsewhere, stocks are far more varied and that is something which counts in the U.S.S.R., where shortages are constant whether one is seeking cloth, shoes or bicycles. The same applies to their restaurants, nursing homes, sanatoria, or rest houses by the seaside or in the mountains, which are better than those for general use and always have vacancies. In addition, in the neighbourhood of Moscow and other large cities there are residential districts for their sole use and the roads leading to them (called "administrative roads") are carefully watched. It is hardly necessary to add that, with very rare exceptions, the *élite* alone are able to obtain permits to buy private cars.

Thus in their private lives, as in their professional activities, our high officials and their families are separated by an absolute dividing wall from the rest of the population. Rather than a class they form a caste the like of which, I believe, is to be found nowhere else in the world to-day.

If at this point I am asked whether workers, office staff and students, the general run of Russian employees, are jealous of or hate their superiors who enjoy so many advantages and are so cut off from the ordinary populace, I feel bound to deny it categorically. As a general rule we accept this situation as a normal state of affairs because we realize that it is by reason of their merits that they enjoy these privileges, and that it is by their own strength alone that they have risen to an eminent position, that they play a part of capital importance in the structure of our country and that this rise to power is possible for each one of us. Moreover, we are also aware that their responsibilities are great, far greater than ours, and their dangers, also, when some malpractice, sabotage, real or supposed, is discovered, when some factory does not carry out its part of the current plan.



**PART III**

**HITCH-HIKING FROM MOSCOW  
TO PARIS**



## FINAL PREPARATIONS

I CALLED my hazardous journey a hitch-hike, but the motor-car did not play a very large part in it. Nevertheless the technique was very much the same—I had to fend for myself and trust to my star.

I interrupted my story at the point where I had definitely and irrevocably made up my mind to leave the country. I had now to carry out my decision and I by no means underestimated the difficulties of the undertaking. Even now, six years later, I am not a little proud of the common sense and caution that I displayed in the execution of an exploit that I am possibly the only man in the world to have accomplished—to travel from Moscow to Paris without a visa or papers of any kind and without spending a single day in a refugee camp or prison.

Before the war the position was very different. In 1939 I should have had to cross only one frontier, the Russo-Polish or the Russo-Rumanian, to find myself on the other side of the Iron Curtain, but for all that my undertaking would not have been any easier. On the contrary it would have been practically impossible. On both sides of the frontier specially trained agents with police dogs to help them kept the barbed wire barriers under constant surveillance, and if I had managed to avoid their attentions I should almost certainly have fallen into the hands of the Rumanian *Sigurantza* which would not have dealt gently with me. There was only one Iron Curtain, but it formed a dividing wall without chinks in it.

On the other hand, in 1947 there were several "lines" to be crossed which one after the other had come into being as a consequence of the war; there was the frontier between



the old U.S.S.R. and the territory that had been added to it, a second frontier between this territory and the satellite countries occupied by the Red Army, and so on, all so many hazards to be overcome. Instinctively I felt that the route through the Balkans was my best chance. I therefore chose the itinerary U.S.S.R.-Galicia-Rumania-Yugoslavia (it was before Tito "broke away")-Trieste-Italy-France. At the very thought my imagination was fired; fancy seeing Venice and its canals and the ruins of the Coliseum. Once the question of my route was settled there were, it seemed to me, several other necessary conditions to be fulfilled.

In the first place complete and absolute secrecy about my plan. At whatever cost I must mention it to no one, neither to my friends nor to my father, even if I were certain in my own mind that the latter would understand. Such secrecy is *de rigueur* in our country. For example, my father, while sympathizing with me, might well consider that my attempt could not possibly succeed and was foredoomed to failure. And this upright, yet submissive, man might have been the first to denounce me to the authorities for my own good in order to spare me a more unhappy fate. Precisely because I loved him and held him in high regard I was obliged to steel my heart against him.

For like reasons I decided to go alone, although I might have adduced all sorts of valid reasons why Andrew Gurevitch, for example, would have been glad to share my adventure and would have made an excellent travelling companion.

In the second place, there was the question of money, the sinews of war (and of everything else). The deposit in my name in the savings bank amounted to nearly five hundred roubles (about £20). This would have to suffice for my needs on the journey. Unfortunately I needed *lei* in Rumania and *dinars* in Yugoslavia and quite obviously I had no means of laying my hands on any as the banks in Russia

do not deal in foreign exchange. I decided, therefore, to invest my small capital in articles of worth which have an international exchange value, and in the street market for two hundred roubles I managed to acquire a fine old gold watch, an aristocratic relic no doubt of the *ancien régime*. Such things are frequently to be picked up in the street markets and second-hand stalls. The rest of my assets would go to pay my travelling expenses for the first part of my journey as far as the Rumanian frontier.

The third essential condition for success seemed to me to consist in looking as unobtrusive and nondescript as possible. I had heard that in the frontier districts N.K.V.D. agents, both in uniform and plain clothes, kept a strict watch on the trains in order to detect illicit travellers of all kinds (prisoners of war, for instance, or those from labour camps) and that passengers were judged principally by their appearance. I must avoid attracting attention and if I looked like a hiker, I decided, I should have the best chance of getting through. I therefore chose as my only baggage a rucksack containing a change of underclothes, a few toilet requisites, the compass that I had used as a Pioneer and a small volume of Pushkin. These were the contents of my humble luggage.

The final ingredient of success was a morale that would stand up to any trial. Not only must I deceive the vigilance of the N.K.V.D. and five or six other police forces, thus outwitting the external enemy, but I must also master what I called the interior enemy, that tiny voice which at night whispered to me, "You fool, what are you trying to do? What's making you take a through ticket to Vorkuta or Kolyma?" An entirely fortuitous circumstance which facilitated the first stage of my journey seemed to me a good omen and gave me courage. I have mentioned that the first obstacle to be overcome was the former U.S.S.R. frontier which had become the demarcation line between our own country and Galicia now taken over by us. In order to cross

it legally it was necessary to possess a pass issued by the military authorities (not the secret police). One of my fellow students, a Ukrainian from Lwow, had obtained one in order to spend his holidays in his native land. When in my quest for useful information I was questioning him about the place he happened to show me his pass which he no longer needed; I was inspired to ask him for it for my "collection" (he had a vague idea that I collected something). He gave it to me without a murmur. It bore no photograph and so there came into my possession a paper which enabled me to overcome the first obstacle under ideal and extremely comfortable conditions. Automatically, too, it settled my route, since Lwow now became a necessary stopping place. The other details of my route at once became clear in my mind—Bucharest-Belgrade-Zagreb-Trieste, and mentally I divided my undertaking into three principal stages.

First stage: through Russia and across the Rumanian frontier.

Second stage: the most uncertain—through the satellite countries, partially occupied by the Russian Army, as far as Trieste.

Third stage: this I hoped to accomplish like an ordinary tourist—through Italy and France to Paris.

## THE FIRST STAGE

THUS, one July evening, my rucksack on my back, bare-headed and with an open-necked shirt, I went to the booking office of the Kiev station in Moscow and showing my pass asked for a third-class ticket to Lwow. I found a place in the wooden-seated carriage with, I must admit, a feeling of some emotion. I had no idea where I should be in four weeks' time, nor in how many years I should be able to see my home town and all my dear ones again. My adventure had begun.

I looked carefully at my travelling companions, two soldiers, an old peasant woman, two men in suits who looked to me like officials—was there among their number one of the formidable *seksott*, the secret informers who swarm all over the country and whose numbers are counted by millions? At first sight they all looked harmless enough, but how was one to know? Especially as, by taking a ticket with a pass issued to another, I had put myself on the wrong side of the law.

The train rumbled out of the station and a great peace stole over my soul. I took my last look at the hills of Moscow through the carriage window. Gradually they stood out on the horizon until finally all that could be seen were the red lights winking from the towers of the Kremlin which remained visible for a long time. Then the train was rushing through the vast spaces of the great Russian plain. I curled up in my corner and lulled by the monotonous beat of the wheels fell into a peaceful sleep.

The next morning the familiar countryside of the Ukraine was passing before my eyes. There were now only three of us in the compartment, the two soldiers and I. The civilians had left the train at Kiev. Then came Proskurov the former Russo-Polish frontier station. Would there be an inspection? Once more I was a prey to anxiety. But nothing happened, and at about two o'clock in the afternoon the different architecture of the houses, in the stations the notices in Roman letters which though effaced could still be made out, told me that we were already passing through what had formerly been Polish territory.

Was I already in a foreign land? I was quite ready to believe it directly I got out of the train at Lwow, the former capital of Polish Galicia. The passers-by in the streets were dressed in what was, to me, an entirely novel fashion; the men wore felt hats, and the women strange-looking cloche hats, all of which aroused my astonishment. Within the

frontiers of the U.S.S.R. I had never expected to encounter examples of "bourgeois" fashions. The Gothic churches with their towering spires also astonished me. But I was particularly struck by the stores and private shops, drapers, grocers and restaurants with their coloured signboards and windows full of goods. At that time trade had not been nationalized in the provinces annexed after the war, but the streets were full of soldiers of the Red Army. At the crossroads the policemen wore the Russian militia uniform and that proved to me that I was still in the U.S.S.R. But no one paid any attention to me. After wandering about the crowded streets of the centre of the town, in my enthusiasm I abruptly decided to change my plan and instead of continuing my journey that evening I treated myself to a good dinner in a restaurant.

It was a strange experience. Instead of taking my place at a canteen table and waiting patiently for service I was at once approached by a pleasant young woman who gave me the menu and waited obligingly for me to say what I wanted. I had known that this was the way that things were done and I also understood that at the end of the meal I should have to tip the waitress. I did so, but was unable to prevent myself blushing like a fool. My embarrassment spoiled my pleasure; rightly or wrongly I felt that I was doing something shameful. I did not even dare to express my pleasure to the young woman as I had planned, and cursing the rottenness of bourgeois customs I took myself off to spend the night in the waiting-room at the station.

I have often regretted that I could not keep a diary during my journey, but the memory of those first adventurous days is stamped almost photographically on my memory. I remember even the red handkerchief worn by a gipsy (another novelty for me: they are unknown to us in the U.S.S.R. save through literature and our geography manuals) who sat next to me during that night. Her

rhythmical snoring, and perhaps also my own nervous state, kept me awake for a long time.

The next morning, having bought a snack by way of breakfast, I booked a ticket and took the train once more, this time for Cernovitz (the last station before the Rumanian frontier) where I arrived about midday. So far no one had asked me anything, but now my real difficulties were going to begin.

Cernovitz, a small town in the Carpathian mountains, is some thirteen miles from Seguet, the first town over the Rumanian frontier. Following the route that I had drawn up in Moscow I intended to do this stage on foot and to cross the frontier line at night.

With my rucksack on my back I set off and soon found myself walking through a hilly picturesque stretch of country. I had done about an hour of my journey when at a turning I was overtaken by a peasant's cart. When he saw me the driver stopped.

"Where are you off to, my lad?" he asked me in his sing-song voice.

I gave him the answer that I had prepared for such an emergency.

"I'm going to Opotchek to visit my grandmother," I answered him in Russian.

"Up you get then. I don't go so far as Opotchek, but my field isn't far from there. I'll take you on your way."

The old peasant's lined face inspired me with confidence and I did not wait for a second invitation. I get on well with Ukrainian peasants; their inborn dignity prevents their introducing personal topics and they are cautious by nature. As we went along we chatted about the crops and the weather.

"Yes, it looks like a good harvest," observed my companion, "so long as Dombrovski doesn't send us a red cock."

I knew that in Ukrainian, as in Russian, a "red cock"

means a fire, but I had no idea who Dombrovski was. For reasons of caution I gave no hint of this, however, and confined myself to an understanding nod.

At a crossroads the peasant brought his horse to a halt.

"Opotchek's over there," he informed me, pointing in the direction at the same time. "You can also take a short cut through the wood by the path that you see to the right. But don't get caught by Dombrovski."

"Thanks, grandpa," I replied with a knowing look, "Dombrovski doesn't frighten us fellows from Moscow."

The frontier could only be a few miles away. I took the wooded path pointed out to me and was glad of the shade for the sun was beginning to beat down with some strength. Who was Dombrovski, I wondered. I remember having read once or twice in the Moscow newspapers reports about the existence of German bandits who still infested the Carpathians. Perhaps Dombrovski was one of them.

After I had walked for about an hour the path crossed a railway line which must be, I decided, that running from Cernovitz to Seguet. A stroke of luck, I told myself; all I had to do now was to wait for nightfall and then follow the rails. I lay down at the foot of a tree and brought out my provisions.

Hardly had I settled down when in the distance I heard voices. Stealthily I beat a strategic retreat into the undergrowth and it was well that I did so for in a few moments I heard my own language. It could only have been a military patrol keeping the railway under observation.

Soon the voices grew faint and vanished in the distance. Huddled in my hide-out I waited for darkness. When night had fallen I set out once more.

I was unable to find the railway again. It could not be far for I had only gone about a hundred yards away from it, but try as I might I could not find the right direction through the undergrowth.

In the end I thought that I had come across my path again. But after a hundred and then another hundred steps there were still no rails. I was lost. To add to my troubles fine rain began to fall.

I decided to continue following the path. It must lead somewhere, I thought, and I could take my bearings by my compass. And soon, in fact, I noticed a light flickering in the distance.

Once more I left the path and made towards the light. I came eventually to a campfire around which half a dozen ragged moujiks were warming themselves. Woodmen, I supposed.

"Who's that?" inquired a rough voice.

"I've lost my way. May I have a warm at your fire?" I replied in Ukrainian.

"Come here. Who're you?"

The man who thus addressed me was tall and bearded and held a sub-machine gun in his hand. He wore a cartridge belt. They could not be ordinary woodsmen.

Some vague instinct warned me that the situation might become serious and that my best plan would be to tell the simple truth.

"I am a student from Moscow and I'm trying to get over the frontier into Rumania," I announced. "Can you show me the way?"

"You're a Moscow type are you? Hands up, then! Tarass, search him. He's probably one of the *Suerch*<sup>1</sup> lot."

I had no other course but to obey. My pockets were turned inside out, my poor rucksack emptied on to the ground and my hands tied behind my back.

"Here's a strange bird and no mistake," mumbled Tarass. "No arms, no papers! But whatever you are, my friend, unfortunately we shall be obliged to get rid of you. If you believe in God you'd better start saying your prayers."

<sup>1</sup> *Suerch*—Soviet counter-espionage service.



So that was to be the end of my adventure. In such circumstances I had an idea that the victim rolled on the ground sobbing and begging for mercy. But not a sound issued from my throat. Although I retained my presence of mind I remained paralysed. It was obvious, I saw, that I had stumbled on a bandit's hide-out.

"Take it easy, Tarass!" rejoined the one who seemed to be in charge. "We must wait for Dombrovski's return. It'll be up to him to decide what is to be done with this spying rat."

So it was Dombrovski, after all.

Tarass, having searched me thoroughly, without further remark pushed me savagely on to the ground. Still without a word another brigand, seeing that I was in shirt sleeves, got up and put a cloak over me.

The thought passed through my head that with bandits, just as in the old films, everything occurred in silence.

How long I remained lying there I cannot tell. I was completely exhausted and cursing myself for the foolish adventure that I had started on; I thought of Moscow, my friends, the University, that I had left scarcely three days previously. I also wondered whether I ought to get into conversation with my guards and plead with them. But I was convinced that it would be useless and indeed I was probably quite incapable of doing so. "So all depends on the mysterious Dombrovski," I said to myself again.

I believe that I dozed off for a short time. Three blasts from a whistle roused me from my half-sleep, I opened my eyes. The stars were growing pale on the horizon. The leader, with his hand to his mouth, in his turn whistled three times. I heard footsteps; two fresh silhouettes came up in the semi-obscurity. A man of medium height in military uniform followed by another who seemed thin and gaunt, dressed in a long coat which came down to his ankles. He wore a cross around his neck,

'All in order, Sergeant?' inquired the first of the newcomers.

"All in order, Pan Dombrovski, except that we've caught a spy. Here he is."

The leader pointed to me.

"One of the *suerch* men? Bring him here."

The leader jerked me to my feet.

"Look here, my friend," remarked Dombrovski in a gentle and almost indifferent tone, "you must realize that we can't let you leave here alive. But if you want a death that is not too unpleasant you must tell us at once what you know. Who sent you? How did you find us?"

My presence of mind returned to me.

"You can do what you like with me; I can't do otherwise than tell you the whole truth. Let me speak!"

And to the best of my ability I recounted the whole story of my escapade. Dombrovski listened in silence, staring hard at me. But when I came to the reasons which made me undertake my journey he interrupted me.

"That's enough fooling about," he remarked. "I'm very sorry, but we've other means of making you talk. Sergeant!"

The tall bearded one, whom I called the leader, came towards me with a threatening air. At that moment Dombrovski's companion whispered a word or two in his ear. The former shrugged his shoulders.

"If you like, Pan Stanislaw," he replied.

"Pan Stanislaw" turned quickly in my direction and addressed me in faultless Russian.

"You say that you studied English literature. What do you know of Jonathan Swift?"

That was an easy one. But at none of my examinations had I ever been so glad that I knew my authors and dates. My answer having been deemed satisfactory by Stanislaw, he questioned me about other English authors. He then turned

to my professors and my family. At last, turning to Dombrovski he said, this time in Ukrainian:

"Alexis, this boy's telling the truth. He may be an adventurer, but he's no spy."

Dombrovski seemed embarrassed.

"But whatever shall we do with him?" he demanded.

"You're in charge here; it's on your conscience. But you must decide according to the facts."

Dombrovski hesitated for a moment or two, then suddenly came to a decision.

"Give him something to eat," he commanded. "I'm tired, I'm going to rest for a bit. We'll see about him later on."

Pan Stanislaw did not seem tired in the least. He made me swallow a nip of vodka and set about providing me with a tasty dish of *borch*. Then with this refined Jesuit priest I had a strange and exciting conversation in the early dawn. For the first time I was in contact with a genuine European intellectual and I discovered that ecclesiastics are not all narrow-minded and superstitious as I had naïvely supposed. On his side, Father Stanislaw seemed keenly interested in encountering a young Russian student. He questioned me about Russian life with the skill of an intelligence officer. He was particularly anxious for information about the habits and aspirations of Russian youth. For my part, I questioned him about Europe, Paris and Rome, which he appeared to have visited recently. He also told me about the desperate struggle waged by Poland against the Nazis, about the concentration camps, the gas chambers and the heroic rising in Warsaw.

"And all that," he concluded, "just to fall under oppression that is a thousand times worse."

"Why worse?"

"The Nazis attacked only our bodies, but the Communists threaten our very souls. And that is what we have to fight now."

I did my best to defend my own country and even asked him, somewhat boldly, to explain to me what a soul is. To-day it occurs to me that a dying and a new-born world faced each other that morning in that sequestered spot in the Galician forest.

The sun was already high in the heavens when abruptly Father Stanislaw brought the interview to an end.

"You must be very tired," he remarked. "You'd better sleep for a bit, meanwhile I'll see what I can do for you."

I lay down on the ground and fell instantly into a heavy sleep.

Night had fallen once more when Father Stanislaw roused me. I looked about me. Dombrovski and most of his men had disappeared. Only Tarass and another were sitting by the fire.

"Listen, my friend," said the Jesuit. "Captain Dombrovski agrees to let you join us. I really think that that is the best solution for you."

My answer sprang straight to my lips; I am still proud of it to-day.

"Never! I'd rather be shot out of hand!"

Father Stanislaw sighed.

"All right. I was expecting you to say that, so I have thought of another way out for you. Tarass is leaving to-morrow on a job in Rumania. You will go with him. I will take entire responsibility. You're bound to admit that you've been very lucky."

I must confess that my reaction was almost automatic—I felt that I wanted to throw myself in his arms, to kiss his hands. . . . He would accept no thanks from me.

"No, don't thank me," he added. "Learn rather to be grateful to our Lord Jesus Christ."

He then turned to Tarass who was obviously not overwhelmed with joy at the prospect of having me for travelling companion. At the time it occurred to me that his "job"

was probably to meet some emissary of the "imperialist" (i.e. British or American) secret service—and now I am sure that it was so—but I was careful to keep my suspicions to myself. Father Stanislaw, however, took a firm stand with Tarass and overcame his reluctance. He seemed to have enormous influence over Dombrowski and his men.

So I took leave of the man who had saved me; once more he wished me good luck and made me learn by heart an address in Rome where, by mention of his name, I could be sure of a hospitable welcome. "There's no doubt about it," I told myself, "I shall have to revise my views about God's servants."

Half an hour later Tarass and I set out together. For three or four hours we walked in silence and at a rapid pace which was almost too fast for me, especially as the path was rising all the way. When we reached the crest of the hill to my great relief the path began to descend.

"Are we in Rumania already?" I ventured to ask my companion.

His only answer was an indistinct mumble. Then the forest began to grow thinner and we skirted some cornfields on the side of the hill, coming out on to a road which led down to the valley. A few hundred yards farther on we came to a crossroads surmounted by a huge wayside cross.

For the first time Tarass's lips were unsealed.

"Seguet's down there," he told me, pointing to the road on the right. "Good luck!"

Without further ado he strode away along the road to the left.

Tired out, but happy, I lay down for a few minutes in the grass. What adventures I had experienced in the last few days! I had stumbled into a bandit's lair and come out safe and sound; I had confronted a cunning and learned Jesuit and without surrendering my own point of view had managed to win his friendship. I had succeeded in getting

into Rumania. I had successfully accomplished the first stage.

## THE SECOND STAGE

AFTER a short rest I made my way towards Seguet. At the first turning of the road in the light of early dawn I could make out the little town down below. I hastened my pace, and half an hour later I found myself in a strange town, a foreign town, with its notices and signboards in Roman letters and the tricolour fluttering from the town hall; it was the first non-Russian flag that I had seen.

The streets were almost deserted at this early hour of the morning. I had seated myself on a bench to eat the last of my provisions when I heard the sound of marching soldiers. A squad of Russian soldiers belonging to the Army of Occupation were going out to drill. This reminded me that I had still something like seven hundred miles to do before I was out of reach of the police of my own country, and that there was no particular reason why I should waste time in Seguet.

But where was the station? Under the impression that I could make myself understood in this frontier town I asked the first passer-by in Ukrainian. He stared at me with incomprehension; I repeated my question in Russian. At once his face lit up, but seeing that in my turn I understood nothing of his lengthy explanations he gestured to me to follow him. His goodwill was immense. Hardly had I crossed the frontier than I discovered what a marvellous advantage I possessed here in the Russian language. Whether from fear or admiration I cannot tell, but directly passers-by or officials heard me address them in Russian they were all deference and helpfulness.

On arrival at the station, therefore, I asked in Russian for a ticket for Bucharest putting down my wad of roubles

in front of the booking clerk with the nearest that I could achieve to an imperious gesture. He, too, was at once extremely helpful, made lengthy and elaborate calculations and gave me my ticket with the change—a thick wad of Rumanian *lei*. In combination with the Russian language the roubles transformed me in the eyes of these people into a prince. I turned the occasion to advantage and bought a snack, Rumanian newspapers (I understood not one single word) and cigarettes (usually I do not smoke). An hour later, comfortably established in a compartment which although third class was upholstered, I gazed at the Rumanian countryside as it flashed by.

The journey was without incident. It was also a princely journey. Twenty-four hours later, having eaten a great deal, drunk a great deal (the Rumanian wine sold at the numerous stops was not without merit) and especially having slept a great deal, I arrived in Bucharest.

Bucharest is a fine place and I can now assert, having seen other capitals since, that in 1947 it was in nowise inferior to cities like Geneva or Bordeaux (I do not know what it is like now). Imagine my astonishment when I saw the shops with their windows lit up, the café terraces crowded, the newspaper boys and the shoeblacks who offered their services to all comers. Already at Lwow I had been struck by the “bourgeois” appearance of the inhabitants, but what can I say of Bucharest where most of the women seemed to me to be made up and dressed like cinema stars. I was both shocked and attracted at the same time. Nor did the men fail to excite my wonder. Many were in uniform. The Rumanian officers in their full-dress uniform and curious *shako* (Rumania was still a kingdom at that time) contrasted with the drab dress of our soldiers and the even more unobtrusive appearance of the British or American officers. Among the civilians I was struck by the number of men, all

well-groomed and obviously with nothing to do, strolling about in groups.

I decided to celebrate my uninterrupted series of successes with a meal in style, and made up my mind to cut a better figure than at Lwow. After which I would go to a hotel for the night, like a real tourist, and I might even enjoy a few days' holiday in this gay and corrupt city.

I entered a brilliantly lighted restaurant from which came the undulating tones of tzigane music. There was a small lamp on each table. My eye was caught by a huge grill in the middle of the room on which, at three levels, tempting-looking chickens were roasting.

To the head waiter who hurried to take my order, addressing me in French, I pointed out the largest chicken and on the wine list which he offered me chose, without looking at the price, champagne bearing the name of the honoured Veuve Cliquot who, thanks to Pushkin, is known to every educated Russian. The dishes were served from an astonishing little trolley of shining nickel; a waiter, as solemn as a bishop, poured out the champagne; the leader of the orchestra asked me to choose my favourite tune. I was no longer astonished by anything. Like a true Russian I ate and drank enough for four and, with the help of the wine, I believed that I was in paradise. To tell the truth, my memory of this fabulous feast is not very clear. I know that I paid the bill in princely fashion with a thick wad of roubles—and received no change.

I was bowed out of the restaurant and once out in the street was considering choosing a hotel for the night when, somehow or other, I bumped straight into one of the Rumanian officers in the comic-opera costume which amused me so much. He proffered a few words of abuse in Rumanian to which I replied with a string of those oaths in which our language is extremely rich. He endeavoured to seize me by the scruff of the neck, but I retaliated with a



heavy blow to the chest. A policeman who came up at this point prevented our scuffle developing into a fight; he demanded our papers. My antagonist showed his, but my protests in Russian were of no avail and the representative of the law, in those peremptory international terms which are understood to perfection without knowledge of the language used, invited me to accompany him to the police station.

Need I say that the short walk there served to remove the final traces of my exhilaration. I had seen enough Russian soldiers in the streets to understand that I was on my way to almost certain disaster—and just for the pleasure of striking a Rumanian.

My only hope lay in flight. In the street, still crowded at this late hour, it was impossible. But my lucky star continued to watch over me. Probably my guardian, who seemed scarcely any older than I was, was not very practised at his trade. In any case, having taken me to the police station he put me in a room by myself and went off without saying a word or even locking the door. No doubt he went to fetch an interpreter or his superior officer. All I had to do was to leave the room, go along a passage and down a floor, encountering no one on the way, to find myself in the street and free once more.

Considerably sobered by this experience, and having perceived how close I was to danger, I no longer sought to spend the night in a hotel. After wandering for a few minutes I came out into an avenue where the trams were still running en route for the *Stationu Principale*. Rather than ask my way of passers-by I followed the tram lines, which soon brought me, as I had hoped, to the station. I spent the rest of the night in the waiting room, glad to lose myself in the dense and motley crowd which had, it appeared, taken up permanent residence there. The next day I took the first train for Temesvár, the last Rumanian town before

the frontier, anxious to see the last of Rumania, its restaurants, its tziganes and policemen.

I arrived in Temesvar the next day after a journey which was uneventful but utterly unlike my triumphal progress of forty-eight hours previously. I was not a little put out that for a mere whim I had endangered everything and without the slightest necessity I had squandered a third of my modest resources. Moreover, a new obstacle awaited me at Temesvar in the shape of the Yugoslav frontier. Although it was not by any means impassable (it only became so in 1948) it presented me with a pretty problem. How was I to solve it? During my journey I noticed several Yugoslav railway trucks with names and destinations written on them in Cyrillic letters; I decided, therefore, to cross the frontier secretly in a goods train under cover of night.

I spent the day in Temesvar; it is a dull provincial town with great flat barrack-like buildings. Rumania had still one or two surprises in store for me, however.

The first incident, which was of an amusing nature, showed me how complicated for a Russian is the first contact with life in Europe. I went to a small restaurant in search of a pleasant but economical meal, and while I was eating my sweet (an excellent vanilla ice) my eye fell on an advertisement depicting a steaming cup of appetizing appearance bearing the name Viadox. The picture and the Latin designation brought to my mind the idea of a cup of coffee or some other pleasant digestive beverage. I pointed to the advertisement. The waiter looked at me with astonishment and brought me the cup of broth. Thereupon, as he regarded me with a derisive stare, in order to cover up my blunder, I ordered a ham sandwich and another ice. The Rumanian waiter could put it down to the proverbial capacity of the Russian stomach.

The second incident was more serious. On returning to the station I quickly discovered a goods train made up of

Serbian trucks marked clearly *Beograd*. The engine was coupled and pointing in the right direction. It seemed to me that this train would provide me with my best chance of getting into Yugoslavia. At nightfall I took up my position near the train half-hidden by a mound and waited for the engine to get up steam. It would be advisable, I considered, to find a place in a truck at the very last moment.

Suddenly, amid the general commotion of a goods yard I heard voices singing *Katiouche*, a popular Russian song at that time. I concluded that it was probably a troop train that had stopped nearby. Then, nearer me, I heard Russian voices and in the darkness made out two figures. There was no reason for alarm, I reassured myself, two Russian soldiers had got out of the train to stretch their legs. In fact, they wanted to relieve themselves.

Then they noticed me.

"Ask that Magyar the time," said one of them.

"Why ask him?" replied the other. "We'll beat him up and take his watch."

No sooner said than done. In a moment the two were on me. One held me on the ground, the other took my arm and tried to undo my precious wrist watch. I fought like a cat. Not a word was spoken; neither of my attackers desired the presence of spectators.

I cannot say how it would have ended if the blast from the whistle of a train on the point of departure had not shrilled out in the night. "That's our train!" exclaimed one of them. "Come on," replied the other and my two aggressors made off as quickly as they had appeared, leaving me with my watch and a few scratches to remember them by.

I, too, decided that it was preferable to take refuge at once in a truck in "my" train. I crouched down in a corner. I knew that foreign watches were greatly prized by Russian soldiers, but until then I had been unaware of the technique

employed to obtain them. At that moment I was not very proud of my compatriots.

As these thoughts passed through my mind to my great joy the train began to move slowly out of the station. I lay down on the floor, put my head on my rucksack and fell asleep.

As I slept I had a vague impression of the train stopping and starting again, I heard voices and I even believe that at one point the door of the truck was opened and shut again immediately afterwards. When finally I awoke, shivering with cold, the train had stopped somewhere in the countryside. A few lights were winking in the distance. Was I in Rumania or Yugoslavia? I was obliged to wait for daybreak. Gradually the shape of my surroundings grew clearer. I slid out of the truck and walked along the railway lines. I had hardly gone a hundred yards when, on a signal post, I noticed a name written in both Roman and Cyrillic characters—Kikinda. So I was in Yugoslavia. Without difficulty or bother I had crossed another frontier—the one before the last!

Kikinda, the first station in Yugoslav territory, is quite a small town; it reminded me forcibly of certain large villages in the Ukraine. When I had taken some refreshment in a café, glad to be able to make myself understood once more (Serbian is very like Russian), I decided to adopt a method that had already worked well and as a beginning take a railway ticket for Belgrade. But at the station I encountered a setback which obliged me to continue my journey under other auspices.

I had still upwards of a hundred roubles in my pocket. Putting my trust in the magic power of our national money I went to the booking office and tendered my roubles. To my great astonishment the clerk refused to accept them.

I tried to argue with him. It was no use, and to insist might prove dangerous. In a state of some vexation I left

the station wondering what I was going to do. Should I walk to the next station?

News travels quickly in small towns. I had hardly got back to the main square considering the best course to adopt when I was addressed in Russian by a grey-haired civilian.

"You're Russian, aren't you, young man? Perhaps I can help you."

He spoke in the purest Russian but something indefinable about him gave me the impression that he was not a Russian citizen. Possibly it was his clothes or his extreme politeness. I cannot tell, but I at once guessed that my questioner, who made me think of my old master Saltykov, was one of the legendary White Russians about whom our Press and propaganda at one time made a great fuss. But I was very glad to meet this one.

As I afterwards discovered, Boris Nicolaievitch de Rosen was a former captain of engineers in the White Army who, after various mishaps, had taken Yugoslav nationality and become the postmaster of Kikinda. His good nature allied with his great common sense enabled him to survive the frequent political, linguistic and even dynastic changes which had occurred in Kikinda in the course of the past ten years. Since 1939 seven different occupying forces had at one time or another been in possession of the town. Boris Nicolaievitch lived on good terms with all of them ("They all needed the telephone" was his comment). This achievement endowed him in the eyes of his fellow citizens with great prestige and a kind of diplomatic immunity so far as the local police were concerned.

He was able in consequence to take me home with him and obtain from me an account of my adventures. When I had told him all he kept me to dinner and then gave me his considered opinion on my future plans.

"In the first place, young man, you need rest. You can stay a couple of days here with me. Secondly, you are not in

Rumania now; your roubles are no good to you. The railways are closely watched so you must continue your journey on foot. Thirdly, Serbians dote on Russia . . . and they adore Stalin—fools that they are. You'll have to invent a plausible story for yourself. What do you think of making yourself out as a former prisoner of the Germans, just back from deportation. You see, they've all been repatriated months ago, but you could say that you had been detained by the Americans."

It was by no means a bad plan; Boris was obviously pleased with himself.

"You could say," he went on, "that you were arrested by the Americans for some petty crime—I've got it, you came to blows with one of their officers. They imprisoned you, you escaped and you're now trying to get home. That'll certainly do the trick. In any case it'll be better than to say nothing at all. Don't tell your story unless you're obliged to, and in any case avoid the large towns and the main roads. With your innocent eyes you've a good chance of getting through. Now go and rest."

I spent two very pleasant days with my new friend and enjoyed a very greatly needed rest. The old peasant woman who looked after him put my modest wardrobe in order; it was already beginning to show signs of wear. Boris Nicolaievitch furnished me with several hundred dinars to help me on my journey, though he kept as security my fine gold watch which formed my reserve fund. He also made me a present of a superb leather wind-cheater with a zipp fastener that delighted me exceedingly. More important still he gave me a map of the country and marked on it my route as far as Trieste. The evening before my departure we strolled down to the café and I was able to observe that my new story was already in circulation. Several of the more important people in the place made a point of shaking hands with me. Slivovitz was drunk, there were shouts of

*Jivio* and toasts to Tito and Stalin, to Russia and Yugoslavia. Boris Nicolaievitch also was warmly congratulated. He was one of those cunning fellows who can always kill two birds with one stone. All the same there was no doubt that his kindness to me was spontaneous and absolutely sincere; he seemed to work off on me all the affection that he still retained for our common fatherland and all his exile's homesickness. In addition he gave me the address of a distant relation of his living in Nicé; it was extremely useful to me subsequently.

Next I made my way back to the station where, in keeping with my new "background" I openly took the train for Belgrade. Two stations farther down the line I left the train and continued my journey on foot.

The route traced out for me by Boris Nicolaievitch carefully avoided the large towns and was divided up into daily stages of fifteen to twenty miles. At the outset I kept to it carefully. I slept sometimes in barns, more frequently in the open air; my food was bread and milk curds bought from the peasants. I found them easy to deal with; they reminded me very strongly of the Ukrainians and like them gave evidence of that inborn tact and caution characteristic of the Slav peasant. Consequently I found no difficulty in avoiding long conversations. After a week on the road I grew increasingly bold and did not scruple to go into shops and cafés to make my purchases. On one occasion the driver of a heavy lorry, loaded with tree trunks, gave me a lift and I was thus able to do about thirty-six miles which saved me two days' walking. On another occasion a motorcyclist, who stopped to make sure of his way, in half an hour took me a whole day's journey. Increasingly, my journey was turning into a hitch-hike.

As a result I went forward far more quickly than at the start, and there only remained something like thirty-five miles to bring me into Trieste when I experienced a final

misadventure whose comic side I can now appreciate, though at the time it caused me very great anxiety.

I came to a crossroads not far from the town of Karlovac and was checking my route with the help of my map when a cyclist rode up and asked me where I was going. "To Karlovac," I replied, pointing to the town three miles off through which my route led. "I'm going there, too," he replied, "sit on the carrier and I'll give you a lift."

At his very first words it had seemed to me that my questioner was almost too kind to be really honest, but I had already acquired that carelessness bred of too frequent success which is one of my failings. Moreover I was now in Croat territory and I hoped that I should be taken for a Serb. I perched myself on the carrier, therefore, pleased at my good fortune and at the fact that the cyclist did not ask me too many questions.

When we arrived in the town he got off saying that he had reached his destination. I thanked him and went on my way. But a few moments later I heard heavy steps behind me; a hand descended on my shoulder and a voice echoed in my ear.

"Your papers, please!"

The policeman who thus addressed me did not look as if he could be trifled with.

"I have no papers," I answered him in Russian.

And I began to tell the story that Boris Nicolaievitch had primed me with for just such an occasion. Directly he heard my Russian the policeman's face lit up.

"Come with me, Comrade," he replied.

He took me to the police station where I told my story again, in greater detail this time, to the heavily moustached official in charge.

"But why are you walking, my friend?" he inquired with astonishment. "Don't you know that there are Russian repatriation commissions at work? Why, I believe there's one



quite close here at Karlovac. Just a minute, I'll give them a ring."

He lifted the receiver leaving me in a state that is not hard to guess. Was I going to fail so close to my objective and fall straight into the hands of the Russian military police?

Once again luck was with me. The Russian repatriation commission at Karlovac had been closed for two or three weeks past. And there was no Russian consul in the town. Relief flooded over me.

"All you have to do," advised the official, "is to go straight to Belgrade by train."

Somewhat timidly I observed that I had no money.

"That doesn't matter," he rejoined, "come with me."

He took me across the road and into a café. My mentor spoke to the customers, whom he seemed to know by their Christian names, and outlined my predicament. Hands reached at once for pockets. The sum collected in a moment or two would have been sufficient to pay my ticket to Bucharest or even Vienna. Greatly embarrassed I just managed to secure the promise that the surplus should be given back to the donors or bestowed upon some charity. In Yugoslavia it was obviously an advantage to be a subject of Stalin.

Once more I took the train. Every revolution of the wheels took me farther and farther away from Trieste. Need I add once more that I left the train at the first station, much put out, somewhat moved and very happy all at the same time.

In the game of snakes-and-ladders that my journey had become I had been penalized to the extent of one move, that is, one day's journey, and was obliged to do it again in the opposite direction. Forty-eight hours later—I covered the final stages by forced marches—I was getting near to Rijeki-Fiume, the last town in Yugoslav territory. I was

not a little surprised to observe that in this frontier district the population was no longer Slav but already Italian. "Bandera Rossa!" cried the children in the streets and the gossiping women expressed themselves volubly in the tongue of Dante. This detail, combined with the smiling countryside, the architecture of the houses and all the rest might well have made me think that I was already on the other side of the Iron Curtain. But the last obstacle still remained to be overcome. My second stage was not yet completed.

While still in Moscow and drawing up my route I told myself that the International Zone in Trieste would be of far easier access than zones occupied by the Western forces in Germany or Austria. And, as it turned out, my reasoning proved to be sound.

My first attempt, however, ended in failure. I soon saw that the roads leading to Trieste were blocked by barbed-wire entanglements and heavily guarded. Could I make it through the fields? It was not to be considered in this half-urban, half-country district criss-crossed by hedges and walls, particularly in the bright moonlight that night.

Thus I was obliged to sleep in a copse with the hope that dawn would bring counsel. Next morning my first care was to buy food in the suburbs of Fiume. At the bakery where I went in search of bread it was impossible to make myself understood save by dumb show. The shopkeeper seemed particularly obtuse and I could not make her understand. All at once a woman who came in after me turned and spoke to me—in English. She was very dark with dimpled cheeks and eyes full of expression. She smiled at me pleasantly and at once I found her attractive. That is probably why, casting caution to the winds, to the best of my ability I answered her in the same language.

She helped me to buy what I wanted and we left the shop

together, then, one thing leading to another, she asked me to her house for a cup of coffee.

Gina Foggioli lived in a small ivy-covered pink-walled house. With the spontaneity of all Italians she talked about herself, her husband who was a prisoner in Russia, her family in Italy from which she was now cut off. For my own part I confined myself to my now well-worn tale. In any case I did not linger over it very long, for after a short time I was able to give the conversation a more romantic turn and it ended in as pleasing a manner as I could have wished.

With familiarity thus well established between us I revealed my true story and told my new-found friend who I was and what I was endeavouring to do. It was a good thing that I did. Gina admitted that she, too, had decided sometime previously to rejoin her family in Italy. Already she was in contact with a smuggler in a neighbouring village. To those who live on frontiers no line of demarcation is impassable.

I had only to wait for her to conclude her preparations. It took four or five days; I spent them very pleasantly without leaving the house, being careful not to allow myself to be seen and living, as I told myself, like a Turkish sultan. It was a most agreeable interlude.

Finally we got into Trieste and from there made our way into Italy in the easiest and most comfortable manner imaginable. Our guide came for us one afternoon and took us in his light cart into the country behind the town. About eight in the evening we set off on foot and after walking for about three hours we arrived at the Trieste tram terminus. We had only to take our seat in a tram to be at midnight in the centre of the city.

Trieste! "We are in Trieste," I kept telling myself. The numerous uniforms that I observed in the streets were all English or American. I had broken through the Iron

~~Even~~ at last. I had completed my second stage. And how very pleasantly it had been accomplished! In spite of the lateness of the hour Gina managed to find a room for us in a small hotel. She registered us as man and wife—*Signore Strogov e moglie*. My journey was turning into a honeymoon. I found it easy to ignore the bugs which attacked us directly I turned out the light, but they inconvenienced my companion. I had seen many more in Russia. Next morning, while I lorded it luxuriously in bed, Gina went out to discover how the land lay.

On her return she informed me that she had found a purchaser for the remainder of my roubles which would fetch the pleasantly round sum of ten thousand lire. With regard to crossing the last boundary line—a question that was worrying me—she laughed out loud. There was no boundary between Trieste and Italy. That evening we were lolling in a gondola in Venice.

In my maddest dreams I had never dared imagine that my journey would end so quickly and in such agreeable company. Venice, with its boat-songs and love-making; that night even our great Pushkin himself might have envied me. But the time for parting was drawing near. After one last night together, when Gina had lavished all sorts of good advice on her "piccolo Russo" she left me. We shared the ten thousand lire between us and I took the train to Florence, the first lap of the third stage of my journey.

## THE THIRD STAGE

NEED I say that from this point in my adventure I went from one delight to another. It was not merely that in satisfaction of my youthful dream I was now treading underfoot that legendary soil that gave birth to our ~~people~~

civilization, the native land of Titian, Galileo and Michael Angelo but I was free, free, beyond the reach of the N.K.V.D. whose threatening shadow I felt over me until I was safely in Italy. In my innocence I did not realize that even in the West freedom has its limits. I had forgotten—or I no longer wished to remember—that there, too, prisons and policemen exist.

A disagreeable incident that occurred in Florence, and which for another might well have spelt catastrophe, did little to curb my optimism. To begin with I took my meals in restaurants, endeavouring to have some part in the gaiety of Italian life. I was only too successful. In a small Florentine café I struck up acquaintance with a group of good-for-nothings, though I was somewhat surprised to encounter young men in their prime who were obviously entirely idle. But they seemed very friendly, I paid for a round of drinks and learned a few phrases of Italian. . . . On the second or third evening I woke up in a ditch with a splitting head and all my money gone. I was not unduly concerned, however, and went back to the way of life to which I had grown accustomed. In order to be not entirely without resources I was obliged to sell my remaining watch.

Italy I should think is the ideal country for hitch-hiking. My experience of this method of travel was so extensive and varied that I can recall only certain incidents which were more adventurous or outstanding than the others. My method was simple. I took up my position at a crossroads outside a town and "thumbed" a lift from drivers. When they stopped I would say, "Prego, signore, Roma?" or "Prego, signore, Napoli?" And it succeeded once in every three attempts at least. I was not at all fussy—lorries, limousines or motor-cycles were all the same to me. I take this opportunity of expressing my thanks to many kind motorists: to the French student who took me upwards of six miles on the pillion of his motor-cycle, endeavouring

the while to converse in Italian, French, Russian and German before we discovered that we could get along in English (here I believe I am anticipating—it must have happened on the return journey between Pisa and Genoa) to the fruit haulier who not only gave me a seat in his lorry but plied me with as many oranges and apples as I could eat—good fortune indeed, but a trifle trying for my stomach (although it is a Russian one); to the Negro military policeman who gave me the hospitality of his jeep and stuffed my pockets with cigarettes and chocolate, wishing me good luck on my way; lastly to my compatriots, with whom in a large black ZIS I drove triumphantly into Rome. But that incident deserves a detailed account.

That day I had been unlucky. I slept on the outskirts of Terni and hoped to arrive in Rome the same day. But no car would stop for me. It was already afternoon when in desperation I “thumbed” a luxurious black limousine (every hitch-hiker knows that cars in this class are the most reluctant to stop). To my astonishment it came to a halt. It was occupied by two men. “Prego, signore, Roma?” inquired. The driver motioned to me to get in and set off again at breakneck speed. But wasn’t he speaking to his companion in the purest Russian? I listened carefully. They were bewailing the lot of the young Italian unemployed like me (for such they took me to be) and expressed their indignation at the inefficiency of the government in Rome. I discovered that one of them was employed as a chauffeur in the Russian embassy in Rome and the other held some minor post. I feared that the adventure would turn out badly for me.

Suddenly one of them turned to me and made a remark in Italian. Of course I did not understand and endeavoured to mask my incomprehension with a “non capito” which I tried to make as convincing as possible. Now they would know that I was not Italian; it looked as if the game was

To my astonishment, and also to my great relief, my questioner turned to his companion.

"It's hopeless," he remarked. "Italians never understand me when I say a few words to them in their own language."

It only remained for me to retire within my shell, that of a *lazzarone*. Half an hour later the car slowed down and came to rest by a brilliant light shining solitary in the empty countryside. My companions got out and invited me to follow them to a pleasant-looking inn; there are a great number of them to be found in the neighbourhood of Rome.

They ordered three cognacs. For the last time in my life I drank to Stalin. Other toasts followed—to victory, to socialism, to Togliatti. On returning to the car my fears recurred, but for quite another reason: I wondered if we should ever arrive safely at our destination in view of the fearful speed at which the chauffeur was driving.

One hour later the car drew up before a large, half-ruined building. It was the principal station in Rome. I took leave of my companions with a loud "Grazie, signori." I should have much preferred to say, "Spasibo, tovaritchi."

That was how I made my entrance into the Eternal City. The next day I visited the Forum and the Colosseum; in the afternoon I joined the crowd waiting in the Piazza of St. Peter's for the Pope to come out.

Southern Italy—and I speak from experience—is a regular paradise for needy tourists of my kidney. The nights are soft and the inhabitants sympathetic to those who desire to sleep under the stars. Neither in the public gardens nor in the station waiting-rooms was I ever disturbed or molested. For drinking purposes there were always the public fountains and I never worried whether the water was fit for drinking; for my food I purchased bread and cheese with the lire that remained to me, and sometimes varied my fare with the fruit gathered by the wayside. I even ~~took~~ myself to an extra journey for Naples is only 125 miles

from Rome and it is said, isn't it?—"See Naples and die." I climbed Vesuvius and joined the crowd of tourists looking round the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum. And then I started on my return journey along the coast, still travelling in the same manner, sometimes on foot, sometimes by lorry.

Among my memories a special place is reserved for Genoa and its port, where I admired the great transatlantic liners setting out for the new world. Should I not perhaps slip on board one of them and be carried to the U.S.A. across the immense blue waste of the Atlantic Ocean? It was a great temptation but I decided against it, postponing it to a later date (at that period, it will be realized, I felt able to bring off anything). I would keep to the route that I drew up in Moscow. Two days later I was already in Ventimiglia.

In the feeling of well-being that possessed me at this time I no longer paid much attention to the Western police forces which I had come to regard as completely inoffensive. When a few miles out of Ventimiglia I observed before me the Customs shed and a small squad of carabinieri I merely retraced my steps a little and climbed some hundreds of feet into the hills in order to skirt an obstacle that in my view was insignificant. At the end of two or three hours walking over the hill paths I judged that I was already in France and began to descend once more. I came out on to a road and, on a signpost, made out the name Menton; I was in France. "Your papers, please!"

The uniform of the gendarme who thus addressed me confirmed the fact that I had succeeded in overcoming the final obstacle. Without worrying unduly I followed him to the gendarmerie. An extraordinary mixture of English and Italian enabled the representatives of authority to establish finally that I was entirely without any identity documents, that I was Russian and that I was very hungry. They treated me with great kindness, put me before a good meal, washed down with plenty of wine and I spent a comfortable night.



in a small private room at the gendarmerie. Next morning I was informed that I was to be taken to Nice where my fate would be decided. Believe it or not, I felt quite unconcerned about the whole matter.

A different gendarme was told off to accompany me. While awaiting the departure of the bus for Nice we treated ourselves to a glass of red wine in a café, another at Villefranche, for it was very hot, and a third on our arrival. All this amused me greatly and had I known the song I should have been quite willing to give a rendering of *Les gendarmes sont de braves gens*. No doubt about it, France offered a particularly warm welcome to tourists from Moscow, one that matched my hopes.

At Nice my gendarme took me to the police station. I was locked in a cell, but not for long. Soon the door opened and a policeman told me to follow him. He also wanted—and this was the only disagreeable occurrence of the day—to handcuff me. Faced with my naïve and violent indignation (in Russia we were taught that handcuffs are a sign of infamy dating from Czarist times), and convinced, no doubt, that I was harmless he merely shrugged his shoulders and did not insist.

Once more we traversed Nice and entered a building with pillars in front of it.<sup>1</sup> There followed a wait of several hours in one of the corridors. Finally I was taken into a large hall in which strangely attired individuals questioned me through an interpreter. I was then taken back into the corridor. In the end a policeman came out holding a paper in his hand and addressed me at some length; I understood not a word. Next I was walked across Nice again to the place which, I understood at last, was my provisional destination.

In fact the building in question was a former hotel which had been turned into a Red Cross reception centre. It was managed by a worthy Swiss who spoke fluent English;

visit ~~he~~ discovered that this building was the Palais de Justice.

from him I learnt that my position was very "irregular" and for that reason I had just been brought before the magistrates who, exercising their clemency, had sentenced me to eight days in prison, the sentence to be suspended as long as I was of good behaviour. It made very little impression on me and I found it all quite natural; it is only now that I realize what I owe to the good fortune which watches, so it is said, over the innocent.

Consequently I was able to take advantage of some pleasant days of entire freedom (with board and lodging assured), during which I returned to my tourist habits and explored the neighbourhood of Nice. I visited Boris Nicolaievitch de Rosen's relation, a charming old lady who had contrived to retain part of her income. Her first reception of me was somewhat cold, but she thawed eventually, and commiserated with me on my lot. She consulted friends of hers, kindly, wizened old Frenchmen with the Legion d'honneur ribbon in their buttonhole, who came to admire the rare specimen. I was given all sorts of good advice, even told that I should join the Foreign Legion; but I desired to make war on no one. In the end I was constrained to accept a third-class ticket for Paris and one of them provided me with a letter for M. Jules Picart, who was half-Russian and in charge of the Reception Centre in the capital. Thus two days later I climbed into the train at Nice for my final destination with enough food for three days provided by the obliging Swiss. In the train I got into conversation with a young Englishman who tried to give me a French lesson. I must confess that I do not remember much of it, save for the annoying mistake which led me to address everyone impartially as *tu* as a result of his explaining to me that *tu* meant *you*. That is the final memory of my strange journey.

Next morning the train steamed into the Gare de Lyon. In fine fettle I had accomplished the third and final st-



**PART IV**

**A RUSSIAN DISCOVERS FRANCE**



## A RUSSIAN DISCOVERS FRANCE

So this was Paris. At last I had arrived at the end of my expedition. After six weeks of extraordinary travelling, after coming close to death in a Polish partisans' den, playing hide-and-seek with the Rumanian police, unwillingly hoaxing my Yugoslav friends, making a romantic entry into Trieste, wandering about all over Italy like a beggar and a first encounter with the French police—after all these marvellous adventures which, until shown the contrary I shall continue to regard as unique, I landed up safe and sound in the *Ville lumière* that is Paris.

With some emotion I made my way out of the Gare de Lyon beneath the first rays of the autumn sun. In my pocket there still remained three one-hundred-franc notes and the address of the Reception Centre in the Quai de Valmy given me by my friends in Nice. But in my enthusiasm I decided to make my way there in the evening and to spend my first day incognito as a tourist.

I began by walking aimlessly, or rather I followed the direction of the street; in this way I came to a wide square dominated by a monument that I thought I recognised from the pictures of it in my history books. It was the Colonne de Juillet and I was standing in the Place de la Bastille where originated the greatest revolution of all time, that of 1789.

I walked round the square and at the entrance to the Metro discovered a plan of the streets of Paris. I did my best to find my bearings; it was quite easy for the Seine was close by. I made out the direction of Notre-Dame, the Louvre, the Place de la Concorde, etc.

I strolled along the embankments and gazed at the towers

of Notre-Dame, reminiscent of the hunchback *Quasimodo*. Beneath me, on the bank of the river, I observed the motionless figures of beggars and the loafers warming themselves in the sun. In Italy I was struck by the sight of men with nothing to do in broad daylight.

I continued on my way. The Eiffel Tower seemed to be playing hide-and-seek with me, sometimes it was in full view and then would disappear. I made it my first objective, for I was eager to go up to the top and enjoy a bird's-eye view of Paris. When finally I arrived at the foot of the tower to my disappointment I found that the lifts were not working. I sat down on one of the benches in the Champ de Mars and after enjoying a snack decided to continue my first day's programme by a visit to the Louvre.

I will not weary the reader by a description of my first impressions of the Louvre, which will remain stamped on my memory for the rest of my days. It will be enough for me to say that I lived this first day in a kind of waking dream, in a state of continual delight and that when evening came I decided to postpone until later my visit to the Reception Centre—I had no idea what awaited me there—and following the example of the ragged loafers, whose tactics I kept under close observation, I spent the night under a bridge in the neighbourhood of Notre-Dame. I lay down on the stone and placed my rucksack under my head. I passed a bad night, for though I was accustomed to sleeping rough my bed was very hard and at dawn I was awakened by the cold.

I got up at once and ran along the embankment to warm myself. The streets were deserted at this early hour of the morning. Suddenly I saw a curious vehicle coming towards me with a harsh metallic noise. I thought that it must be a French Army tank and considered it much less powerful-looking than our Russian ones. But it drew up beside the pavement and two civilians in shirt sleeves got out, dragging

with ~~them~~ large metal cylinders. ~~It was~~ one of the Parisian<sup>o</sup> dust-carts on its daily round, ~~discovered~~ by watching the operations carried out by ~~them~~. In Moscow refuse is collected in ordinary lorries ~~are not~~ in special vehicles.

How should I arrange my second day? I decided to begin by making a pilgrimage to the house ~~where~~ Lenin worked before the First World War. I knew ~~that~~ it was in the Rue Beaunier in the fourteenth *arrondissement*; I had also discovered before I left Moscow that the Friends of the Soviet Union had placed a tablet on the wall.

But how was I to find the Rue Beaunier? I could not trace it on the Metro plan which had become my guide-book and so I, who so far had not opened my mouth since my arrival in Paris, was obliged to ask someone. I dared not ask a policeman, obviously, and was diffident of asking a man. Instinctively I preferred to ask a woman's help.

I take this opportunity of asking the pardon of all those pretty Parisiennes whom I must have scared stiff as I demanded in my strictly phonetic pronunciation (in Russian all letters of a word are sounded), *Roué Bonnié? Roué Bonnié?* They had not the slightest idea what I wanted and I was obliged to give up my pilgrimage.

I spent the day in exploring the west end of the city, the Arc de Triomphe, Trocadéro, Bois de Boulogne, etc. My food consisted of bread and *croissants* which I purchased ~~by~~ pointing at what I required. Already I was in far lower spirits than the day before; I was weighed down by gnawing anxiety and increasingly dreaded going to the Reception Centre which in my imagination began to assume the aspect of a prison. I wondered, indeed, whether I should be surrendered to the police. That night, too, I preferred to spend in "freedom" and in order to avoid some of the cold I returned ~~to~~ the Gare de Lyon and passed the night in the waiting-room.

I was hardly able to sleep a wink and in the morning my



legs would scarcely carry me. My head was aching and I was shivering; I felt faint. With faltering steps I set out for the Quai Valinot, my way to it along the Saint-Martin Canal.

I found the Reception Centre; the name was displayed on a board over the doorway. Finally I made up my mind to go in and inquire for M. Picart's room. With some trepidation I knocked at the door.

"Come in."

"I have a letter for you," I told him in Russian.

While he read the letter from Madame de Rosen's friend, I looked at the man who at that moment held my destiny in his hands. He seemed to me pleasant enough. With a certain interest, and not unkindly, he began to question me.

The questioning turned into a friendly and indeed an animated conversation. But suddenly his face, the table, the walls began to go round in front of my eyes. I collapsed slowly to the ground and lost consciousness.

When I came to myself I was in the same room but in bed with clean sheets to cover me. It was a pleasant sensation, but I felt very weak. The door opened and M. Picart entered, a thermometer in his hand, and took my temperature.

"It's a good thing that you haven't a very high temperature," he told me, "or I should have been obliged to send you to hospital. Have you a pain anywhere?"

I had no pain; I was merely suffering from the reaction after the fatigue and excitement of my long hitch-hike. But I was obliged to stay in bed for nearly a week, hospitably lodged by M. Picart in his own room and looked after with great kindness by all the staff of the Centre. The cook, a worthy Algerian, known as Père Belkader, took the trouble to bring me in person large helpings of his soup which I swallowed down greedily.

When I was able to get up, M. Picart told me that he would

keep me at the Centre as long as was necessary for me to get quite well and learn a little ~~more~~ ~~more~~ looking for work. In fact I stayed there upwards of ~~two~~ ~~three~~ weeks, during which I began to learn something about life in Paris. I did a great deal of walking, ate enough for four and, save for some small odd jobs that I did for M. Picart, had very little to do. I began to keep a diary, some extracts of which I have here reproduced, for they will, I imagine, interest my readers, and show something of the impressions of a young Russian as his eyes are gradually opened to the realities of life in the West.

## EXTRACTS FROM MY DIARY

*October 3, 1948.* To-day I took my first long walk. I followed the Saint-Martin Canal as far as the Bastille. The streets were crowded, but the buses and taxis were not so good as ours. There are many churches and I even encountered some nuns. I find that the streets are dirty. Paper blows about, there are banana skins underfoot and all sorts of rubbish.

*October 5.* M. Picart advised me to take a walk along the Boulevards. It was a lively scene and never had I seen such displays of goods. There were all sorts of advertisements everywhere, some of them seemed amusing. It is a pity that I do not yet know French. Nowhere could I see a portrait of General de Gaulle either on the walls or the public notices. Yet these Boulevards are the main streets of Paris. M. Picart laughed and said that we were not in Moscow where portraits of our leaders look down on you from the windows of the houses, factories, schools, restaurants and theatres.

~~It struck~~ ~~me~~ at one point that there were two haberdashery shops by side, and in another street two grocers. I have noticed the same thing in Italy. It is absurd, for they will

be obliged to compare with one another. Such a thing could not be found anywhere in Russia.

October 8. To-day ~~my~~ <sup>my</sup> ~~friend~~ gave me a very useful present, a book from which to learn French without a master. I am going to work hard every morning from nine to twelve. In a month's time I must be able to speak French!

October 10. This afternoon I went to see the central market (Halles Centrales). I saw a man and a little girl, dressed like beggars, rummaging about in a dustbin, yet all round them was an abundance of vegetables, meat, fish, etc., such as I have never seen in my life. The scene agreed with the description in our newspapers of life in capitalist countries. Of course with us, too, there are rich and poor, but I never saw such great poverty side by side with such plenty. What astonishes me is that officers and generals are never to be seen in the streets, although there are a large number of private soldiers.

(Note added in 1953.) At first I was unable to distinguish between privates and officers because in France their uniforms are not unlike, whereas in the Soviet Union, without wishing to be ironical, the generals are got up like those in comic opera.

October 12. To-day, Sunday, M. Picart told me to take a journey by Metro. The Paris Metro is very poor in comparison with the Moscow Underground. There each station is a veritable palace embellished with marbles and granite from the Urals. I admired the discipline of the Parisians who stood aside and allowed the passengers to get out. In the train I saw men give up their seats to women and the old. So it is true that the French are the most polite people in the world. I can already say a few sentences in French; to-day I managed to chat with Père Belkader a little.

October 15. Yesterday evening I went for a walk and came to a square which was lit up as if by daylight; I counted three theatres and two cinemas. It was the Place Pigalle. I was

astonished to see life-size naked women pictured outside one of the theatres. How can such things be allowed? Twice I was approached by over-printed women who smiled at me and invited me to go with them. One of them even plucked at my sleeve and I was obliged to swear at her in Russian to make her leave me alone. They were prostitutes, part of the rottenness of the bourgeois system. This morning I tried to tell Père Belkader about it. He said these women are called *moukères* and laughed. I see nothing to laugh at.

October 16. To-day I returned to the Boulevards. It came on to rain very hard, and I went into a large store to take shelter. I was astounded by the great quantity of goods. Another astonishing thing was to see purchasers themselves choose what they wanted and then hand it to the sales staff. If they were allowed to behave like that our good people in Moscow would steal half the stock in a very short time. When I regained the street I noticed a negro family—father, mother and daughter. No one seemed to pay any attention to them. In Moscow they would have been followed by a crowd; with us any foreigner is a rare specimen.

I sometimes feel very lonely among so many strangers. I see very little of M. Picart, who is very busy. I must learn French more quickly so that I can make some friends.

October 20. To-day I had many adventures, but all's well; that ends well. I took the Metro to go to the Bois de Boulogne. In the train an inspector demanded my ticket and then told me that it was wrong. I could not understand why it should be since I had just bought it and I was unable to make myself clear. The inspector began to shout and threaten me. A pretty girl in the carriage came to my help; she was French but spoke Russian. She explained that as I had entered a first-class carriage I must pay a surcharge.

I got out with her and walked a little way in her company. This is a student from Dijon at present visiting relations.

Paris. She invited me to lunch with them next week. I am only pleased to have been invited to the home of a French family.

October 22. This evening M. Picart had a long talk with me. I told him that I had this invitation from the Prégermain family. He teased me a little and told me that as they were Burgundians they would certainly make me eat frog. So it is true the French eat frogs? I always thought that it was a joke.

M. Picart also told me that all workers in France are insured in case of illness or accident. I was greatly astonished; at home everyone believes that such a system is in existence only in the Soviet Union. Even on this point our newspapers tell us lies.

M. Picart told me that I could not stay long at the Reception Centre and that I must think about looking for work. I answered that I realized it only too well. We then spoke in French and he congratulated me on my progress. He advised me to read newspapers.

October 25. I had dinner to-day with the Prégermains. They have a large flat; four rooms and a kitchen just for the two of them when Monique is not there. At home, in a flat of that size, two or three families—ten persons at least—would have been accommodated. When I told Monique, she answered that in Paris people were complaining of the housing shortage. During the meal M. Prégermain put questions to me which Monique translated. They were absurd questions: for example, is it true that marriage and the family have been abolished in Russia and that half the population is in concentration camps. I believe that Monique was embarrassed by these questions.

All the same they are good people. What a pity it is that in France so many lies are told about Russia, and in Russia so many about France! I see now that I was right to come to Paris. I shall be able to fight against such lies.

They gave me an excellent meal. There were two bottles of wine—in France wine is drunk by all just like we do with us—but no frogs. There were oysters which I ate for the first time in my life. I thought them tasteless.

I agreed with Monique that next Saturday she shall take me to a fair. She suggested that I should write to her in French for practice in the language.

October 27. I am beginning to read the newspapers a little. M. Picart lends me his every day. It is full of crimes and murders and I can find hardly any really serious articles. I also read the advertisements, of which a great number are inserted by quacks, astrologers and self-styled fakirs. How can such things be allowed? In the Soviet Union swindlers of that kind who batten on the credulity of the populace are severely punished. I notice also that most Frenchmen believe in God. In this respect they are very backward. With us it is only the old who still go to church.

October 28. To-day I entered a café and ordered a glass of white wine. I was served by the proprietor in person. He was very pleasant and I endeavoured to converse with him so far as I could. Afterwards it occurred to me that this worthy person, who served me himself was from the social viewpoint an exploiter. And all the other shopkeepers in the same street together with the proprietor of the garage, the cinema, etc., were in the same category: they employ workers for their own benefit and so perpetuate an unjust system, in spite of the fact that they are kind and just like other men. Our workers in Moscow would be glad indeed to have at their disposal cafés of this kind where they could drink a glass of wine, meet their friends or play cards. But we have no cafés in Moscow.

October 30. To-day in the street I noticed a hoarding covered with posters. It is election time. I was able to read and understand a good deal of what I saw. There are numerous candidates and each says what he thinks of the others and

enjoys full liberty of expression. There is even a Communist ~~with~~ who wants a revolution like the Russian one, and the bourgeois system allows him to continue his propaganda. It is extraordinary.

*November 2.* I spent a wonderful evening yesterday with Monique. How pleasant it is to have a French friend. She took me to the fair, where I showed what a young Russian can do. At the shooting booth I won ten pounds of sugar. Then we went on an amusing little scenic railway which according to Monique is called in French *Montagnes Russes*; in Russia it is called "American mountain railway." There were other sideshows in booths, just like a circus in Russia. But what a disgrace are all these mountebanks and fortune-tellers. When I told Monique my opinion she said that she did not wish to talk politics.

*November 3.* To-day was my last meeting with Monique. To-morrow she returns to Dijon. That is a pity. She kissed me and told me that I was her "little Russian." We both promised to write.

*November 7.* Already the weather is growing colder, but most people continue to walk about hatless. The Parisians seem less sensitive to the cold than the Russians. In Moscow a man without a hat in winter would be taken for a lunatic. No one here wears high boots or galoshes. Even the police do not wear high boots. I wrote to Monique in French.

*November 11.* M. Picart told me that to-day is Armistice Day, kept in honour of the French victory in 1918. In the street there are flags on many of the houses, but not on all. I saw no processions in the Boulevards and the buses are running as usual. With us the great celebrations are far more impressive and all the houses are decorated with flags. The caretaker who forgot to put on his flags would soon hear about it from the police. Here everyone does as he likes, in my opinion that is the better system, but it makes the ~~culture~~ ~~atmosphere~~ less gay.

*November 16.* I have just spent a night in a French hospital. This is how it happened. After dinner Père Belkacem brought me up to his room and gave me an Algerian dish of tomato sauce. Later, when I went out, I was suddenly taken with sharp pains in the stomach. I was so ill that I sat down on the edge of the pavement and could not move. Passers-by helped me up and a motorist took me in his car to a hospital. There I was put to bed in a large ward and a doctor, in a white coat, just as in Russia, made me take some drops.

This morning the doctor came to see me again. He told me that there was nothing wrong and that I could leave. But first he took me to the office where an official told me that I must pay the hospital charge. I was astonished and almost angry. I informed him that I had no money and that in Moscow hospitals are free for everyone. He called his chief who was very nice to me. "If you don't pay in Moscow," he said, "you shan't pay here in Paris." And he let me go.

I told M. Picart how I had spent a night in hospital and how astonished I was, and put out, when they asked me to pay. It made him laugh. He told me that I ought to write out my first impressions of Paris and that it would make an interesting book.

No answer from Monique.

*November 20.* I am very pleased for I have found work. In the street I happened to run into some people speaking Russian. I was unable to bear it and entered into conversation with them. They are White Russian emigrés. They were very kind to me and took me to a Russian restaurant. The owner at once took me on, without papers or any formalities. I begin work in three days.

Before I start my job I am following M. Picart's advice and have written the lines which follow. I have called them "The twenty-five discoveries of a young Russian in Paris."



## THE TWENTY-FIVE DISCOVERIES OF A YOUNG RUSSIAN IN PARIS

1. *The "Boss."* The owner, the proprietor, a bourgeois in flesh and blood: the local café, the shops which fill the street, the local cinema, the hotel and even the small factory opposite my window all have their owners, their "boss." So this is what the bourgeois, the capitalists, the exploiters are like, the people who are shown on Russian propaganda posters as very fat, with great bellies, in tall hats and a cigar between their pinched mouths and their hands covered in blood. It is a trifle disappointing to observe that they are just like other men and very different from the picture that I had of them.

2. *The Paris Café*, which is to be found at every step, its hospitable doors open to all, for a drink with workmates after a day's work, for an apéritif with friends; where you can sit before a cup of coffee and dream of the girl you have fixed up to meet. A Parisian could not imagine even a large town without its cafés and their terraces always available when you need them. Moscow is such a city without cafés, with no terraces to sit on in summer. There are, however, expensive restaurants in Moscow—the Metropol, Moscow, Savoy, which correspond to Maxim's and La Tour d'Argent in Paris.

3. *Prostitution.* Place Pigalle, and its theatres with naked women. It should not be thought that in Moscow there are no more nor less loose women. But prostitutes and even who sell their charms, are not to be found there because, is neither bought nor sold in Russia. The Place Pigalle with its night clubs and theatres with naked women and so on are entirely unknown in Russia and the only light there is formed by

factories on night shift—that is all the large factories. Yet men in Moscow are not ascetics and the women are made of ice—in spite of temperatures of twenty degrees below zero. The usual solution to the problems of love and sex is to be found in marriage and the family. Social or financial position counts for nothing. "Experience," then, is obtained under the most natural conditions. Men and women do sometimes contrive to have relations outside the bonds of matrimony and in Russia adultery is probably more widespread than it is in France, a country that is reputed by Russians to be one of loose morals. Men, like women, rarely take their misfortune seriously. Crimes of passion are almost unknown. As a consequence of the long period of re-education in the post-revolutionary period men no longer look on their wives as a personal possession. And women take full advantage of their position and rights. The situation is resolved without tragedy, if possible by divorce. But divorce is difficult and separation still more so owing to the housing shortage in Moscow. Divorced couples, continuing to share the same one and only room are quite usual. Mention of love reminds me that in France I made an incredible, and astounding discovery: the third sex.

4. *Dogs.* I notice a great variety of dogs in Paris, and everyone seems very fond of them. In the streets of Moscow, neither dogs nor cats are to be seen. (One advantage is that they do not foul the pavements.)

5. *Wedding rings,* together with rings and jewellery generally, and even imitation jewellery. Wedding and engagement ~~rings are~~ quite unknown in Soviet Russia where this custom has disappeared entirely, though it was usual in Czarist Russia. Jewellery of any kind has gone out of circulation and gone is indeed a rare metal in Russia. Not to mention ~~it~~ ~~there are~~ there are not even gold watches. Yet there is no ~~gold~~ gold in U.S.S.R.

6. *Monks and nuns.* There are no monasteries or convents in ~~our~~ Russia. Only "Popes" (i.e. priests) are to be seen, ~~it is~~ rarely that people turn and stare at them. Some people have never seen one in their lives. The untiring anti-religious propaganda, conducted for many years past, has borne fruit. Russians do not believe in God and the slogan, "Religion is the opium of the people," still remains carved on a building in Red Square, opposite St. Basil's Cathedral now transformed into a museum.

7. *Public lavatories and urinals.* There are none of these extremely useful places in Moscow. It is true that Lenin, at the period of our greatest difficulties, promised that the day would come when lavatories in solid gold would be put up in the streets of Moscow. Meanwhile there are none there, either in gold or corrugated iron, and the entrances to buildings suffer in consequence.

8. *The plentiful supply of goods,* if not in every home, at least in the shops. What a choice there, what quantities, all that the heart can desire! In Moscow unfortunately people can only dream of such a state of affairs.

9. *Advertising,* whether of wireless sets, condensed milk or anything else in the streets, the Metro, on the cinema screen, in the newspapers, on the walls of houses . . . in glaring colours, some animated advertisements, some still, some illuminated, some not: an inhabitant of Moscow finds all this astounding after being used to advertisements confined to theatrical and cinema announcements.

10. *News items in the papers.* Whether it be a traffic accident, an attempted suicide, a plane crash or a daring burglary, a railway smash or an explosion in the mines, the Soviet newspapers maintain complete silence on these events of the daily life of the country, as if they were state secrets. Reading of the Moscow Press gives the impression that nothing happens in this immense country—never a fire, never a railway accident, never an explosion in the mines, nor collision, suicide or

burglary. A like reticence is displayed by the Press about the life of the leading national figures, whether political or artists.

Mention of newspapers reminds me of another discovery in this context—the sale of papers by shouting them in the street. This is unknown in Moscow. Purchase of a paper in Moscow is quite a difficult problem. They are only to be found in the news stands at an early hour of the morning. People queue up to get them, there are not enough to go round. As a result borrowing a paper from a fellow-passenger on the Underground or a bus is quite common and usual.

Periodicals illustrated in colours for women and children, which form so decorative an item on the Parisian kiosks, are never to be seen in Moscow.

11. *Political posters.* A poster attacking the government or its policy or laws is a sensational discovery for a Russian. The sight of a poster accusing the government in power and its ministers of all the crimes imaginable and calling for its resignation being read by a policeman without turning a hair (perhaps he agrees with it!) is calculated to astound a young Russian. That indeed is freedom: freedom to read the newspaper of one's choice, whether for or against the government, freedom to speak against its policy, to express one's thoughts, political ideas and convictions without worrying whether or not they are pleasing to the government. Whether that is a good thing or bad is a different question. What is certain is that such freedom produces a very severe psychological shock to a young Russian.

My imagination boggles at the idea of a poster in the streets of Moscow conceived in these terms, "Unfit to prevent the signature of the pact with Hitler" (in 1939) or a placard, "Roosevelt must go" at the time of his visit to Moscow, or "Down with the three-years plan" or even "Down with Stalin!"

12. *Government crises.* No one seems to worry when the Government falls, and there is sometimes none for weeks. People imagine that it is quite usual. A funny country!

13. *Strikes.* Transport, Metro and Post Office strikes especially. Here it appears the workers can stop work when they like and there are no fights in the street and blood on the pavements. When it is remembered that in Russia a worker who stays away from his job risks a prison sentence, the astonishment of a Russian at this state of affairs will be understood. And the fact that the Government, while continuing negotiations amid absolute calm, calls in the army only for refuse collection and the police only to the post renders the surprise even greater. I should have seen a strike of the public services or the Underground during which soldiers of the Red Army would have refused and N.K.V.D. agents knocked on the doors of citizens on strike in order to deliver their letters!

*The Week-end.* Russians know nothing of the week-end; they work eight hours a day and six days a week with a short interval for a meal. In the large factories in the Soviet Union work goes on night and day and all the time, morning, afternoon or night shift one week after another.

*Holidays with pay and family allowances.* It is not true that these things exist elsewhere than in Russia (we have family allowances) but that people there do not even dream that they can function under conditions of Western capitalist exploitation. Social services, hospitals and holidays with pay are considered in Russia as the special advantages of the Soviet system. Russians know nothing of family allowances. Only families with five, six or seven children are given a grant (and a medical certificate). Unemployment is unknown in Russia . . . but there is no unemployment

## OTHER DISCOVERIES AND SURPRISES

16. Moscow is larger than Paris, but the latter is more beautiful. That did not surprise me. "See Paris and die" is a Russian saying.

17. There is more overcrowding in Moscow than in Paris. In the former a family housed in one room is quite common. The population of Paris could easily be doubled without further building if it were housed "Moscow fashion." In Paris people live under the roofs (they call these rooms *attics*); in Moscow there is competition to live in the cellars. "Renting a corner" somewhere is frequent in Moscow; it means a divan in the corner of a room, a folding bed, or even just a few chairs put together to serve as a bed.

18. Paris is dirtier than Moscow where the municipal street cleaners hose the streets and squares regularly. There are receptacles for rubbish in the streets. On the other hand, the yards of the large blocks of flats and other buildings refuse piles up for several days, even weeks, in enormous wooden dustbins which are only emptied occasionally. The Paris dustbin and special dustcart which clears the bin every morning constituted a real "discovery" for me.

19. The Paris Metro is so far inferior to the Moscow Underground that it is hardly credible.

20. Men in Paris (not to mention women) do not wear boots even in winter. Nor do the military or the

Paris do not shave their heads. The soldiers also

The French eat frogs and all kinds of  
all thought in Russia that this is only

## *Escape from Moscow*

Although Frenchmen know caviar and vodka they are interested with *bartch* and *kacha*, the standard dish of a Russian menu.

White bread is to be found in Paris. How small! For a Russian who usually eats only black bread is cheaper, white bread is a luxury. Almost all Frenchmen drink wine. Champagne and Cognac are French products (it is often thought in Russia that they come from the Crimea).

The French believe in horoscopes, fortune-tellers, astrologers, healers, and even in miracles. In Russia, however, fortune-tellers, astrologers, healers are considered as charlatans and criminals. They are severely punished.

(Additional discovery.) Michael Strogoff, the hero of the *Théâtre du Châtelet*, the name of the

prize is given as a school prize. In Russia nothing of the existence of my homonym, the character of his imagination. Although all his other qualities are transferred and form the favourite reading of Russian boys, the story of Michael Strogoff, the hero of the *Théâtre du Châtelet*, is an exception. It is not difficult to understand why my diary comes to an end.

Some years have now passed since I set out to see for myself. The Moscow student has led an extraordinary life. I have had one job after another, most of them with the Russians—one always a little stranger than the last—and I have been fired with enthusiasm for the cause of world citizenship (although my campaign is independent of that by Garry Davis); I have spent three months in prison (the police caught me putting up a poster, and the posters were not in order) and then . . . As

next that is another story.

THE END





